

JULY 1996

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# InterZone

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# interZone 109

July 1996

science fiction & fantasy

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# Interface

In the January 1995 issue 99, I asked readers to vote on their favourite (and least favourite) stories published in the magazine during 1995. Sixty-five ballots were received by the deadline, a quite sufficient number to give a valid result – thanks to everyone who participated. As usual, we subtracted all negative mentions from positive ones to arrive at the following scores. The total number of stories published last year was 63; but to save space, and embarrassment for some who came at the bottom of the heap, we list just the top 40 or so stories here.

## STORY POLL RESULTS, 1995

- 1) Brian Stableford: Hunger & Ecstasy of Vampires 22
- 2) Greg Egan: Silver Fire 21
- 3=) Eugene Byrne: Bagged 'n' Tagged 20
- 3=) Geoff Ryman: Warmth 20
- 5) Eric Brown: A Prayer for the Dead 19
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- 8=) Ben Jeapes: The Robson Strain 15
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- 24=) Jennifer Swift: Man, Born of Woman 9
- 26=) Barrington J. Bayley: Get Out of Here 8
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- 26=) Mary Soon Lee: Assembly Line 8
- 26=) Mike O'Driscoll: A Soldier's Things 8
- 30=) Rudy Rucker: The Loonies Need You 7
- 30=) Sylvia M. Siddall: Written in the Flesh 7
- 32=) Keith Brooke: Riding the Serpent's Back 6
- 32=) Charles Stross: Ship of Fools 6
- 34=) Stephen Baxter: Brigantia's Angels 5
- 34=) Kathleen Ann Goonan: Sunflowers 5
- 34=) Brian Stableford: The Serpent 5
- 34=) Ian Watson: Ahead! 5
- 38=) Stephen Baxter: Darkness 4
- 38=) Vilma Kadlecova: The Goods 4
- 38=) Christopher Priest: In a Flash 4
- 41=) Piers Anthony: Bluebeard 3
- 41=) Geoff Ryman: Home 3
- 41=) William Spencer: The Crash Investigator 3

The remaining 20 stories all scored fewer than three points. As you can see, there was no runaway winner this year, with Brian Stableford's short novel "The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires" just squeaking past Greg Egan's "Silver Fire," Eugene Byrne's "Bagged 'n' Tagged," Geoff Ryman's "Warmth" and Eric Brown's "A Prayer for the Dead" to take first place in a close-run race. Our congratulations to these five authors on doing so well, and indeed to all the others who scored in the top 40. But remember, this is a mere racing contest, so to speak – not a reliable measure of literary value!

Brian Stableford's *The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires* has now appeared in expanded form as a hardcover book from Mark V. Ziesing [PO Box 76, Shingletown, CA 96088, USA], priced at \$25. It arrived too late for mention in this issue's "Books Received," but will be listed there next month. For anyone who has not read the story yet, in either form, I would like to point out that despite its title it is a work of visionary science fiction (though with large dashes of the fantastic and horrific). A deserving poll-winner.

Artists' and non-fiction writers' poll results should appear in the next issue of *Interzone*.



## Interaction

Dear Editors:

Thank you for publishing Stephen Baxter's excellent discussion on science fiction's failures, and few successes, at portraying the real world of spaceflight (*Interzone* 105).

In general, I agree with much of his analysis. However, Baxter waltzes right to the edge of one vital insight, and then fails to fall in, or even to get his feet wet. Without explicitly saying so, he shows that much of the American hard science fiction crowd lives so completely in the past that, even when the world is viewed entirely on their own terms, they fail to recognize success when it slaps them in the face. They are so busy crying over milk spilled a generation ago, they fail to see that, today, humanity's expansion into space is going very well indeed. It is healthier, both economically and politically, than it has ever been.

This whole idea that humanity could conquer the vast reaches of the Solar System – or even of the surface of Earth's not-so-tiny moon – in the 39 years since 1957 is patently absurd. Yet it was, and is, this desperate belief that "we can go there ourselves" that has caused so much of the bitter disappointment that Baxter describes.

Let us put that single absurdity aside, and out from under its heavy shadow we can take a quick look at the human expansion into space as it really stands.

Today, just 39 years after the first satellite, we have private and semi-private companies from half-a-dozen countries offering commercial transportation to space. For a few tens of millions of dollars, you too can buy a ride into orbit. The rockets can loft more than twice the payload at half the cost of their military-sponsored

forebears. Developing countries and ex-Communist states are successfully earning hard currency by launching commercial satellites on converted ballistic missiles. Before the end of the century, a new generation of commercial rockets (Ariane-5, Delta-III, Atlas-2AR) will orbit even greater payloads at substantially lower cost. The vital point is that, except for Ariane, the new rockets are being developed entirely with private funds. The hard-nosed companies and banks that are coughing up this money believe that they can make a buck in space, or the money would not be there.

A dozen or more private companies are successfully raising several billion dollars each, all in the private market, to orbit vast networks of commercial satellites. The first satellites of the first network have already been orbited; others will begin flying before the end of this year. These new satellites will offer more different kinds of communications services than anyone could have imagined even five years ago.

Meanwhile, month after month, the much maligned Space Shuttles trundle into orbit. True, the Shuttle orbiters failed to reduce the cost or complexity of human spaceflight by the orders of magnitude advertised, but that wasn't really in the cards for a first-generation vehicle. What the Space Shuttles have done is orbit the same mass as a Saturn-V (if you count the orbiter as payload); executing almost ten times as many flights so far as the Saturn-V ever achieved; at a steadily declining cost-per-flight of one-third or less that of a Saturn-V launch (assuming the very highest estimates for the true cost of a Shuttle launch, i.e., about \$500 million). All of this is providing a vast base of practical experience on working in space.

It looks very likely, now, that the International Space Station will finally see orbit, while Russia's space station, Mir, has been permanently inhabited for years. The most significant thing about the International Space Station is that, once it is built, it will become a market, requiring that  $n$  kilograms of supplies be delivered day in and day out, without fail. This giant orbiting base is the guaranteed market that commercial space transportation industry needs to raise the money to develop new, second-generation shuttles.

The second most significant thing about the Space Station is not how often the project's opponents have come close to killing it, but how tenaciously it has clung to life. Every time one excuse to build the thing has fallen by the wayside (competing with the Russians; growing semiconductor crystals in orbit), a new set of excuses is found (cooperating with the Russians; growing protein crystals to help develop new medicines). It seems that

humanity, or at least Western civilization, is bound and determined to get into space and will dream up whatever reason is needed at the moment.

Meanwhile, much of the hard science-fiction community, at least in the United States, dreams the 1990s away. They are still lost in the 1950s, still looking for that vast, expensive government programme that will instantly open the Solar System with no justification except to let us sf fans get our rocks off on Mars. This is not surprising, I suppose, for a nation that elected Reagan to the Presidency and Gingrich, et al., to Congress just to return us to those supposedly golden years of instant (tax-free) gratification.

None of this means that hard science fiction has been a total loss at anticipating real spaceflight. I think the mid-century American sf writer who came closest to foreseeing the way real spaceflight would evolve was Poul Anderson. Remember his flamboyant entrepreneurs building vast corporate empires, wheeling and dealing their way into a profit in space; slowly expanding first into orbit, then the Solar System, and finally along the nearby galactic arm – then read, in the business section of any major newspaper, about the equally flamboyant characters running the combat industry. Rightly or wrongly, the seeds for Anderson's future are all around us.

Baxter chastises Anderson for concentrating on the far future, but, ironically, while everyone else was looking for the next Apollo project and not finding it, Anderson looked at history and saw a balkanized push into space by essentially ugly characters motivated mostly by personal profit. In the process, he captured the long periods of time it will take to conquer the stars, just how vast the distances to be conquered are, the many false starts and disasters that lie along that road, and the diversity and tenacity of human effort and motivation that will be required. Most other hard sf authors simply ignored these facts, setting their stories in a space programme indistinguishable from an idealistic crusade, or so far in the future that all of the hard work had already been done.

It is a safe bet that no one reading these words will see more than the first, tentative steps into the inner Solar System – but that does not mean it will not happen. As Poul Anderson saw, history, even just human history, is far longer and grander than the wishes and dreams of any of us.

For further discussion of some of these ideas, see my article in the Mid-December 1995 *Analogs*.

**Donald F. Robertson**  
San Francisco

(E-mail address: donaldrf@hooked.net)

Dear Editors:

Here are the stories I particularly liked from last year's *Interzones* (in order of publication, not preference):

1. "The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires" by Brian Stableford – one of Dr Stableford's most bizarre breeding experiments, as H.G. Wells is crossed with Bram Stoker and the resultant offspring is mated with Conan Doyle.
2. "Kollapse" by Gregory Benford – revenge is visited upon those who believe everything they read in *Wired*.
3. "The True History of Dr Pretorius" by Paul McAuley – a deal-with-the-devil story for the sophisticated reader; the allusions are great fun.
4. "Dark Lady" by Geoffrey Landis – flatters you into believing that you can think like a physicist.
5. "In a Flash" by Christopher Priest – the most convincing tone and voice of all the pastiche turn-of-the-century narrators this year in *Interzone*.
6. "Warmth" by Geoff Ryman – sentiment in the service of social comment; how Dickens might have written were he alive today.
7. "Mr Volition" by Greg Egan – a very clever attempt to explore the mind-body problem in science fiction; Egan makes his task even more challenging by basing his story on a profoundly mistaken philosophical notion which is inimical to fiction, i.e. the idea that there is no such thing as a person.
8. "Bagged 'n' Tagged" by Eugene Byrne – most satires this outrageous would be bleak and bitter, but Byrne shows his warm heart by allowing his yuppie villain (having met his just desserts by being made a street-sweeper) the dignity of performing a Pareto analysis on the distribution of litter.

You asked about what readers would think of having more translated stories appear in *Interzone* – I think it's an excellent idea. It's ironic that so much science fiction is about communicating with creatures who have evolved on distant planets, when very often we don't make the slightest attempt to find out what those alien beings across the Channel are up to.

**Jennifer Swift**

Oxford

Dear Editors:

Having recently read Greg Egan's brilliant and satisfyingly science-fictional novel *Distress*, I turned to the review by Chris Gilmore in *IZ* 105 to compare his observations with my experience.

Chris was astute and erudite, and for the first three paragraphs I was enjoying a masterful reviewer at work... and then he floored me by announcing that he was "sadly disappointed" in *Distress*, apparently because he felt there was

"too much" in the novel (!... but that's precisely one of the qualities which brought the book to life! There is too much to deal with in the world [both in the book and out here]: in the same moment a source of rich detail and of "spiritual" indigestion [itself a key phenomenon in both the dirty action and the disintegrating human culture of the story].) I was amazed to see Chris crying disappointment where I had been delighted!

What's more, he goes on to cite some unspecified "irrelevant hare" (? beats me, I remember no irrelevant subplots) and goes on to dismiss the main character's identity crisis and major growth experience as an "intrusive and risible romance".... which of course the strike of inconvenient love certainly is, like a snakebite you may regret but must still focus some energy on if you are to survive; and Worth spends a few uncomfortable moments observing his own predicament, learning about himself, as do the readers, even while changing under the stresses involved, during the course of which he does certainly see himself and his love as "risible".... but it is distasteful and unworthy of Chris to denounce the affair as such.

I was surprised to see Chris dismissing the asex character, an up-close manifestation of the societal memes at work in the novel, as "a neuter straight out of... Delany's 'Aye, and Gomorrah'." This is not a true reference: Delany's neuter spacemen were fetish objects for earthbound people with sexual obsessions for them because they were *space men*, not because they were neuters. Egan is dealing with the choice of asex as a way out of the festering confusion of humanity's condition, as a transformative leap of controlled evolution. And Worth's loss of himself and descent into that confusion is precipitated by his falling in love with an asex, and while he naturally manifests an incongruous sexual lust as part of his blind human response, that is not the focus of the "romance." The "romance" is all in Worth's appalled experience of himself. The "relationship," on the other hand, is a friendship which plays a key role in the novel.

And more, Egan's asex works as a person, not simply as a cypher. Which is why this is more truly a novel than either of Egan's previous novels: it's got people who change and grow and struggle to simply live in the world as they find it, with its bewildering chaotic diverse cultural turmoil.

Chris astutely described Worth as an "observer of the human scene... in a volatile and frenetic world which he understands far better than most." Along with the Big Plot Idea involving the creation of the Universe as a corollary of the final explication of the Theory of Everything (TOE), the novel has another stream, in no way a subplot, concerning Worth's fall

from this privilege of clear-eyed detachment, from super-equipped tele-journalist "too cyber for punk" (in Chris's apt words) into bungling, silly human (perhaps even too stupid for the circumstances in which he finds himself) who falls in love despite himself with an asex!

The reason I am writing this is because of Chris's complete blindness to this aspect of the novel, which I simply cannot understand. It is so science-fictional! Chris says the novel would have been better served if Worth had "suddenly discovered his own latent homosexuality"! He says that falling in love with the asex offers only "pathos" (whereas I found the one love scene between them to be truly poignant, in its evocation of what it means to be nakedly human with another human, stripped of all roles and identities, even sexual ones), and goes on to say that this badly damages Worth's "credibility as the man who becomes centrally involved with the central idea".... Which I think is exactly opposite to the import of these scenes in the novel!

It is only through this potentially disastrous emotional fall that Worth becomes engaged as a human, and not as a camera, in the momentous times in which he is living. It is precisely this fall which enables him to play the role he does in the central plot, because he is *not* uniquely essential to the TOE but in fact... read the book to see what I mean, I thought it was great fun, as well as moving at times... and it's got ideas like diamond sparks from the wheel of creation, a *film noir* thriller plot which hinges on arcane mathematics and wild but hardcore science-fictional speculation... it's rich and marvellous, and grows before your eyes!

Syd Foster  
Cila, Swansea

Dear Editors:

Re Dave Stone's letter in #107. It strikes me that marketing books through libraries would only prove what the publishers already know: that the books most people want to take out of the library are the latest Stephen King or Virginia Andrews' novels, or franchise novels – the "spin-offery" of TV shows, novels hijacked by movies or their novelizations.

The thing is, when you walk into a library and are confronted by hundreds of novels you will either check out the shelves where your favourite authors are, or go to the new "genre" racks; my own local library has little stickers on the books to label them as "science fiction," "western," "romance," "thriller" – there's even one for "short stories" and, to confuse matters, tons of books with no stickers which are also all racked together, a mixture of unclassifiable "novels," plus some science fiction, westerns,

romances and thrillers which have slipped through the stickering system. Let's look for Stephen King: his *Dead Zone* is in science fiction, *Carrie* hardback is in horror (in paperback it's in "Young Adult") and *Dolores Claiborne* is in the general rack. Before you've even read the novel, you have to know what it's about so you can find it in the library. The computer catalogue system simply lists them all as "Fiction."

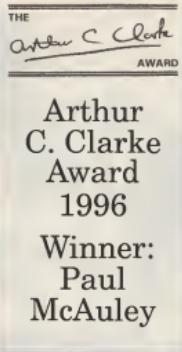
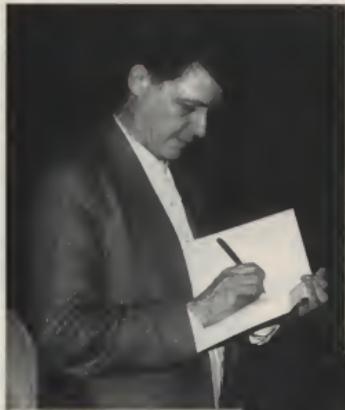
I've always imagined that the library system's buyers order books by genre rather than by any other criteria. Hence Robert Hale's continued publishing of westerns which have a steady (if slowly declining) readership. Their novels are the most generic looking books around, with no marketing of individual authors or titles. Similarly, "spinoffery" novels are rarely marketed as an event: the character's or team's names will always be bigger than the authors – Judge Dredd and Dr Who dwarf both the title and byline of their novels. They are being sold by genre.

As Dave Stone says, new names do crop up, and they'll be bought by fans of *Dredd*, *Who*, *Star Trek*, or whatever, without prejudice. That's great for the newcomer since his or her first novel will enjoy a solid sale. But they won't enjoy sales to anyone outside the ghetto.

And exactly how many new writers are breaking into these markets? The same names seem to turn up time and time again, crossing the generic barriers and writing whatever franchise the publishers are pushing. As an example: Liz Holliday has done *Cracker* and *Bugs* novels for Virgin, *Soldier Soldier* for Boxtree, and *Thief Takers* for Carlton. She has a good reputation for delivering and that, more than anything, is what the editors of these series are looking for. Both Paul Cornell and Andrew Cartmel, whom Stone uses as examples of "new" writers, had their first *Who* novels published in 1991 and 1992 respectively, so are not *that* new. Of the twelve Dr Who novels advertised in Virgin's last catalogue, only one is by a first time writer (*Just War* by Lance Parkin), which isn't a particularly good hit rate for newcomers.

At the end of the day, Stone's possible solution for giving the publishing system kick up the ladder whilst promoting new writers just doesn't seem to work: the publishers themselves prefer to stick with the talents they have (and I'll not deny that some of them are indeed terrific writers – where else would you find a Robert Sheckley novel these days if it wasn't for the *Alien* franchise?) rather than new writers, and the libraries are so genre-minded that if you've decided you don't like, say, westerns, you just avoid the racks with the westerns and stick only to the comforting safety of

(letters continue on page 30)



Above: Christopher Priest, whose novel *The Prestige* was also a nominee.



The Arthur C. Clarke award ceremony for 1996 was held in the Science Museum in London.

Above: Paul Kincaid, administrator of the Arthur C. Clarke awards, congratulates this year's winner, Paul McAuley.



Above: Four of the big wheels present: John Parker of MBA, John Jarrold of Orbit and Malcolm Edwards of HarperCollins.



Centre right: Jane Johnson of HarperCollins was one of many distinguished editors present.

Many other authors attended including *far top right* winner in 1991 Colin Greenland, *below* Graham Joyce, and *bottom right* Rob Holdstock

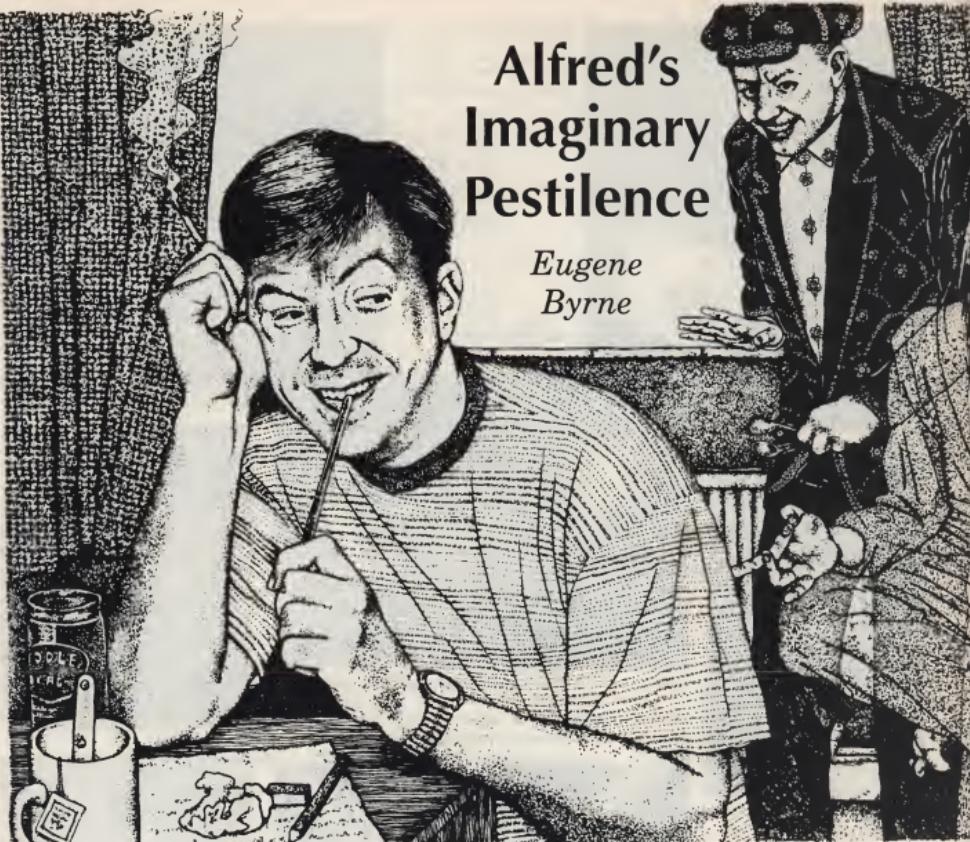


Below: David Pringle, editor of *Interzone*, discusses the outcome with Edward James, editor of *Foundation*.



# Alfred's Imaginary Pestilence

Eugene Byrne



As soon as I can afford it I'm going to get a display case for my gilded cow-pat. At the moment, it's on the living-room mantelpiece, and whenever Jane and I take time off from more (ahem!) pressing matters, we wonder to each other how come a) it doesn't smell, b) it's firm and solid and, c) the gold paint doesn't flake off. It must have had some kind of resin sprayed on it before it got painted, or maybe it's not real at all, just a plaster cast. I'll have to ask someone next time I'm down the pub.

The cow-stuff will become a treasured family heirloom, to be passed down the male line of the dynasty that we have just started work on.

Jane and I have only known one another four days, but already we know we're to be married (big white church wedding or her mother won't speak to her again; you know the score) and we're going to have lots of babies. The golden turd is the physical symbol of our love.

I won it in a competition at the Duke of Wellington the other night. I've been a regular there since I moved into the area, and for all that time I've entered its annual Bullshit Charity Challenge.

I won't bore you with the minutiae of the rules; peo-

ple take it in turns to tell a tall story, provided they don't get booted off before the finish. The whole lot is officiated over by a bloke dressed as Baron Munchausen. The winner gets the golden bullstuff. Like I said, it's for charity.

The gist of my winning story was that over several days in March I was visited by a bloke from 80 years in the future who dearly wanted me dead. It was a bit like that Schwarzenegger film, *The Terminator*, except that this bloke's name was Alfred. The other difference with the Terminator was that (for technical reasons Alfred said I wouldn't understand) Alfred couldn't come back in time physically. He could only transmit a life-sized holographic image of himself. So although he wanted me dead, he couldn't actually kill me himself. If he tried kicking me, his foot would just pass right through. If he tried picking up the carving-knife to... Well, he couldn't, could he?

Alfred had clearly thought about this problem beforehand. He just hadn't thought hard enough about it, that's all.

The first occasion on which his presence manifested itself was on a Saturday afternoon, as I visited the



Illustrations by Russell Morgan

supermarket. At that time I felt very low; it had been almost a year since I, and most of the rest of the Systems Development Department at Dominion Life, had been made redundant. I'd been there too long, so my leaden handshake had been pretty good. I had decided to live on the cash while I established a career in what I really wanted to do. I wanted – want – to be a composer.

To think you can instantly switch from designing invoices to making a living writing music is only marginally less stupid than believing you can pay the bills with your poetry. Still, I thought, I'd never forgive myself if I didn't at least try it before I got too old and cowardly, or too sensible and married.

Ten months on, the money nearly gone, I hadn't written a single thing I was pleased with. I blamed myself; all those mornings I hadn't got up 'til eleven or twelve, all those evenings down the pub, or at parties, or watching television, all those times I had sat down to do some work, but somehow just couldn't get started...

That day, I decided the only thing to do was to eat and drink well, for on the morrow I'd have to sign on. Late in the afternoon I drove to the supermarket and got smoked salmon, a couple of steaks, a bottle from New Zealand, another bottle from South Africa and

some cream cakes.

I was taking my bag across the car-park to my dear old Metro (read: clapped-out heap only now invested with affection because I couldn't afford to run it much longer) when this voice started yelling behind me, a long barely-articulate string of expletives.

A wino, a filthy, bearded creature of indeterminate age staggered towards me with a broken bottle in his hand. I didn't wait to discover whether his murderous intent was directed at the world in general or at me specifically. In a matter of seconds my groceries and I were in the car, heading home.

"Wait," he yelled as I swerved past, "I gotter kill yer. Man said you've to die. He'll give me a ten guineas..."

My life worth ... ten guineas?!?

Back home, I wondered about this poor victim of care-in-the-community for a while, but then the Black Dog got me. I opened the South African bottle and downed half of it at once. I looked at all my possessions, carelessly acquired during my boom years: the books, the CDs, the videos, the hideously expensive hi-fi, the keyboards, the MIDI system, the computer. Well, I could live without most of it, but I still needed three squares and a roof overhead. My sole source of

income was playing keyboards with the Mike Madsen Quartet, a reasonably successful jazz outfit that played one or two local gigs a week. It was hardly enough to live on.

By the time I'd finished the bottle, I loathed and resented everyone and everything. I particularly hated jazz, or at any rate the kind of slick, trendy stuff that the Mike Madsen Quartet played. All style, no content... What was the point of it?

Aaarrgh! Boring, embittered old git alert!

I shouldn't be home alone mired in self-pity. After grilling and eating half a steak, and giving the other half to the cat, I walked down to the Duke.

It was a quiet evening, but eventually Mike Madsen, he of Quartet fame, wandered in. We chatted and played a few games of pool. I didn't tell him my problems, or how I much I hated his band. I wasn't sober enough to be sure I'd explain it the right way, and with the last of my cash gone, I needed to keep on the right side of my only source of income. And anyway, Mike's a nice guy. We parted company the best of mates at closing time.

My arriving-home-half-cut routine is to brew a pint-pot of tea, plonk myself in front of the telly and channel-surf until I pass out. I return to semi-consciousness between two and four a.m. and go to bed.

That night was no different. I had my tea and veered between a *Friday the 13th* film and a documentary about Stalin until lapsing into oblivion. When I regained semi-consciousness there was a snowstorm on the telly; I would now have a leak, drink some cold water and fall into bed.

The problem was that someone was blocking my path to the bathroom. He (I presumed it was a He) wore nothing but a substantial pair of black swimming-trunks and his skin looked like some messy 1960s disco backdrop, all the colours of the rainbow all moving around. He had close-cropped red hair and a weird-looking pair of sunglasses over his eyes.

"What the fu..." I said, or words to that effect.

"Yo," he said.

I screwed my eyes shut and open again a few times, wondering if I should find myself a weapon. He produced a newspaper in either hand.

"Name's Alfred," he said. "From the future. These are tomorrow's newspapers to prove it."

One was, I think, *The Observer*, the other was the *Sunday Times*. Both had headlines about a cabinet split over Europe.

Then he disappeared, just dematerialized.

I fetched my cricket bat anyway, and spent ten minutes wandering the flat seeking the multicoloured intruder. The best answer I could come up with was that he was some kind of hallucination; maybe there'd been something in my drink... I put the bat away and went to bed.

Next day, Sunday, I crawled out around 10.30, put the kettle on and went out to the corner newsagents for a paper. I wasn't really thinking of anything at all until I got to the shop – and saw the newspaper headlines, and remembered the strange visitor.

What do you do when something like that happens? What can you do? Not much. I just got on with things, but of course it nagged at me all day. The papers read, I tried to get down to some work, but couldn't start anything. I opted instead for useful-feeling displacement activity – ironed shirts, hoovered the living-room, fed the cat, took an inventory of the larder (I'd be starving soon, remember), cooked dinner, watched some improving Sunday-evening TV and fell asleep on the sofa. I woke at around 10pm and decided to go to bed and read a book.

There was this guy sitting on my bed.

"Yo," he said.

"Yo yourself," I answered.

He wore a kaftan, flared jeans, and a lot of beads. I sort of assumed it was the same guy as appeared the night before, but I couldn't be sure. His face was obscured by long black hair, a pair of dark, round glasses and a Zapata moustache.

"Alfred. From the future," he said. "I, uh, like, wasn't sure you'd remember me from last night. You would appear to have snorted a lot of crack, or smoked some Ecstasy, or such. Or could be you is malnourished. Common hassle when you've got no bread."

"It was alcohol, actually," I said for conversation's sake. "Umm, how can I help you, Alfred from the future?"

It was only when the cat came into the room, jumped on the bed, and apparently walked through the stranger that my hair actually stood on end.

"Will cut to the point," said Alfred. "I'm from the future, 21st century. I'm a holo projection, not in person. Can't clue you in on how I got here. If I did you might drop the dime to some techie, leading to premature technological development. Could, like, divert the whole timeline. Also, is real mindfuck concept. Too heavy for destitute salaryman dude to dig."

"Uhhhh, right... You tell me how you got here, and I'd rush off and tell Professor Stephen Hawking how to build a time machine. I get it."

All the while he's sitting there, the cat is licking herself in the middle of his stomach. I'll concede there was stuff going on here I wouldn't understand.

"Right on," he said. "Listen, I got a cosmic problem, man. I need to lay some bad vibes on you. Need you stiff. Can't whack you in person. Tried to persuade dogbreath the wino to waste you yesterday but he screwed up. Probably didn't buy that line I fed him about giving him ten guineas. So you'll just have to ice yourself, dude."

"Excuse me, but are you trying to tell me to commit suicide?"

"You're really bad news, man. Don't expect you to dig this, but you're carrying a genetic mutation. Gonna cause incurable disease, first outbreak 2070. Your grandkids have carried the pox to half the race. This big-league bummer is still, like, doing its thing. Gotta be stopped. Is why we busted all the rules to send me back to eyeball you. Kill yourself now. That'd be just the coolest thing. Like, pretty please with a cherry on, man?"

"Ri-ight," I said. "Err, you can appreciate that this is all a bit sudden. It's rather a lot for me to take on board at once. By the way, does everyone in the future

dress and talk like you?"

"Say what? Oh. The words are from an archive construct. You're musician. A hep cat hipster finger-poppin' daddy. I got this jive and hippy talk chip plugged into my head to help me rap like 20th-century musician counterculture youth hero. Just like you. I figured that if I looked and talked like you, you'd be more laid back about what I got to say. You'd know I wasn't some tightass straight old square from the system."

"Oh. Right. Er, how come I'm carrying this disease?" I said.

"Genetic mutation. Might be because you spend big time working VDUs. Don't know. I'm not a medic."

"So what are you, then, Alfred?"

"Physical apprentice. Indentured to Professor Brizon. We've developed the technology for this visit. Programme rushed through to fix your head before you get it on with a chick and, she becomes, like, your ol' lady and then like, an earth mother, y'know? The reproduction thing? It's a major no-no, dude."

"Alfred," I asked, "can you prove to me that I'm carrying this disease?"

He shrugged, still oblivious of the cat in his stomach. "Can't figure how," he said. "I could lay some newsvids on you through the cathode-ray tube thing you have in the biggest room of your pad, but I guessed you'd figure it for plastic. Is kids' stuff to forge. No reason for you to get hip to it."

"Well, okay, so what if I do kill myself? Won't that change the future in other ways? My death now might cause other, even greater disasters," I said, not really believing it. "I mean, if I die, then I won't write any more music to, err, to move hardened hearts, to inspire children, uplift people's souls. Maybe I or one of my kids will one day save the life of someone who's going to come up with something that'll benefit all mankind... or something."

Alfred stood up. "Is nothing worse than you living, man. Nothing. My man the Prof. Brizon, she's crunched all the numbers. The bean-counting we've done is, like, cosmic. It beats the *I-Ching* and every mother's book of the dead into the shade. And what the numbers, the runes, the knucklebones, the chicken-entrails and the computers all say is the same thing – you're a waste of space, man, a deadbeat, nowheresville. You, your music, your whole freakin' existence amounts to *nada*. But hey, that's not where I'm coming from; fact is, that lying dormant in your genes is real bad karma, a nightmare trip. You reproduce and you spike the future with real bad medicine."

"Thanks, Alfred. You really know how to cheer a bloke up."

I wanted to help, really I did. I just didn't want to die. That was when inspiration struck. "How would it be if I got a vasectomy?" I asked.

"Say what?"

"A vasectomy. A small operation that would stop me having children."

"Vasectomy, huh? Just chill. Be right back."

He dematerialized. Just like that, leaving me wondering if I still had that half-bottle of whisky I'd last seen a week or two back.

Before I could go get it, Alfred reappeared, looking



happy.

"Been looking up vasectomy" he said, slightly breathless. "Right on, man. Vasectomy is cool. Hang loose. See you tomorrow..." He vanished again.

Over an almost sleepless night, all I could come up with was the startlingly insightful realization that I didn't want to die. If this wasn't an hallucination, then I had to save the human race. Unless Alfred was lying. But what other possible reason would people in the future have for wanting an ordinary bloke like me dead? Some kind of sick psychological experiment?

If Alfred was lying then should I do a runner? Leave home, leave the country? It didn't sound promising; if they had the technology to send Alfred to visit, then they could track me down wherever I was hiding. And if they could do that, they could surely find ways of getting someone else to kill me, or of making my TV explode with the force of a half-ton of Semtex, or something. People from the future can do all sorts of amazing things, can't they?

I got to sleep about five, got up the next afternoon, took a long walk and worried. I even found myself in the library looking up vasectomies.

I got home about six and was sitting in the kitchen having some eats when Alfred showed up. He was dressed as a pearly king.

"Evenin' all! Oh gorblimey Old Kent Road apples and pears I've got a luvverly bunch of coconuts knees up muvver Brown..." he said in a cockney accent. Then, in neutral tones, "... Apologies. Must adjust voicechip. Is malfunctioning."

"Alfred," I said. "I was just having dinner. Do join me."

"Come on Arfur, let's get down to Margate for some hop-picking," he said, reverting to cockney and not particularly addressing anyone. "Gerrrrrrtcha! Oh gorblimey leave it out! Are you selling this motor then, or wot? Tell you what my san, do you a lovely set of wheels for a couple of monkeys and a... AAAHH-WEEE-EAH BIN TUGEVVER FAWTY YEARS NAHHHH, AN' IT DON'T SEEM A DAY TOO MUCH-AH!"

He fiddled with a tiny knob behind his ear. "Ouch! That bleedin' hurt... There. Think it's sorted now. Some of these old voice-chips are a bit dodgy. Got sold this one by a geezer who said it was slightly flood-damaged. Hope it wasn't a ringer... Oh they was right gents they was. They only ever hurt their own sort, an' my old muvver could walk the streets in safety, and... Oww! Bleedin' thing! There. I think it's okay now."

"Alfred, what are you wearing?" I asked.

"Don't you recognize my whistle and flute?" he said, crestfallen.

"You're Elvis? Liberace? You're covered in rhinestones, right? Or is it sequins? Gary Glitter? No, can't be. You're talking like Chas & Dave... Oh, I get it, you're a pearly king."

"Right on the nail, John" he grinned. "Since the old hippy talk didn't slap and tickle your fancy yesterday, I thought you'd feel more at home if I got the vocab print and clothes of a proper cockney sparrer. You're from the Smoke, aren't you?"

"Well, I was born in Ealing. But my father moved around a lot with his firm. When I was a kid we lived in Birmingham, then Southampton... I don't think I've ever heard the sound of Bow Bells."

"Oh lumme, leave it out! I've pissed on me chips again, haven't I, John?"

"I couldn't have put it better myself."

"Now then," he said, all business-like. "This vasectomy blag of yours. 'Fraid it's a non-starter. Nothing's changed over here. You didn't get it sorted, did you?"

"Well, no, I can't just have it done at once."

"You wot?" he said, sitting cross-legged on the table opposite me. "You mean you can't just get over to a branch of Medicare, slip them a few sovs and get the snip straight away?"

"No. And I don't believe it's escaped your attention that I don't have any sovs anyway. I'm destitute, remember?"

"Oh. Yeah, right. You're Jurassic lint."

"So anyway, I'm sorry. All I'm going to do is give you my word I won't have any children. I'm not going to kill myself, and that's the end of it."

He sighed and shook his head. I carried on eating.

"Ere. What's that scrat, then?" he said after a few moments. "Boiled beef an' whelk stalls? Jellied eels and carrots? Bangers and nosh?"

"This, Alfred, is beefburgers, oven chips and baked beans. It's junk, but I happen to like it. And as we both know, I'm skint."

"Arf a mo... Beefburgers, like made of dead animals?"

"That's what it says on the packet. Alfred, you're not going to get all vegetarian on me, are you?"

"You mean to tell me that you eat animals that're brown bread! Yeuch!..." He was genuinely appalled, but then brightened considerably. "Ere, all that stuff's crammed with preservatives and saturated fats and other muck, isn't it?"

"I believe so. Alfred, please don't lecture me on my diet. I get enough of that from other people. I am a bachelor, I am partial to junk food, and even if I wasn't I can't afford to eat properly anyway."

"S'allright, Del Boy. MAYBEE IT'S AH-BECORSE I'M A LONDONER! Shit! Ouch! Voice-chip's on the blink again. Ere, I think you should call up some more of this stuff. You're looking a bit peaky anyway."

"No thanks," I said as I finished. "That's quite enough for me."

I'd already made a pot of tea, and now poured myself a mug and added my usual four spoons of sugar.

"Here, is that cocaine you're putting in your drink, or what?" said Alfred, like a five-year-old kid wondering if you were about to give him a present.

"No, Alfred, it's sugar. Coke is for idiots. I don't do drugs. Never touch them," I said, lighting a cigarette.

"What the bleedin' hell is that?!"

"It's called a cigarette, Alfred."

"Lawks! A cigarette? I've heard about those things. They're full of carcinogens! Brilliant! Er, I mean, terrible. What brand is it? Snouts? Lungbusters? Fags? Gaspers? Benson & Hedges?"

"Old Holborn and Rizla, actually. Yes, they're very bad for you. I'm giving up next month."

"There's no need to do that, young Rodney, me old china plates of meat."

"No really, I should. Smoking's a disgusting habit. Expensive and bad for your health. I'd like to quit soon."

"Yeah, you're right. You should look after your health. You need more exercise, John. You ever tried hang-gliding?"

"No thank you."

"I know! How about a holiday? Couple of weeks away from it all, put your feet up somewhere nice and sunny. You should lie out in the sun for ages getting nice and brown all over. Nice dose of skin cancer... I mean, sun... There's this lovely place where I bet the food and drink are right cheap..."

"Chechnya?"

"Got it in one, mate. You should take the plane to Chechnya and get yourself a nice tan. You'd love it, honest."

He disappeared shortly afterwards, saying, "catch you later."

I slept a little better that night now that things had degenerated into farce. Next day, I went and signed on, did a little writing, and played a gig with the Quartet in the evening. I got £30 in cash for the job and a couple of free drinks.

Mike and his van dropped me and my gear off at my place about half past twelve. I'd finished lugging my stuff into the hall and was taking my jacket off when a tiger sprang at me.

Several moments after the tiger had actually sprung through me and I was starting to enjoy the adrenaline rush, I said, "you'll have to try better than that Alfred."

The tiger metamorphosed into a completely naked Alfred. "It was worth trying," he said gloomily in a neutral accent. "Given your diet and addiction to alcohol and tobacco I thought that you might be good cardiac-arrest prospect."

"Yeah, I probably am," I said. He disappeared again.

He visited each evening for six days. He'd tell me I was looking off-colour and needed some fried food. He plied me with my own cigarettes and suggested I have a weekend in Paris, and told me how to book a place on a plane that crashed, killing all its passengers, the following day.

I won't dwell on the armed police raid that turned up early one morning following an anonymous tip-off that I was, and I quote, "a fundamentalist Anglican terrorist," with 200lbs of cannabis and a nuclear arsenal in my airing-cupboard. "Someone must really have it in for you," said the Inspector apologetically while a constable sellotaped a piece of cardboard over the hole in my front door.

Maybe I should have left, gone to stay with my Mother or some friends for a week or two. Instead I got bloody-minded, determined not to be moved. All that week I only left the flat for a couple of trips to the corner shop and a gig with the band. I isolated myself even more by unplugging the TV, the hi-fi, the vid, all my electronics. This was partly because I feared Alfred had the ability to make them explode, but partly also because I didn't want any of this stuff cluttering my mind during my struggle for survival. Things might

have become farcical, but this guy still wanted me dead, didn't he?

Being so completely alone, apart from Alfred's brief evening visits, did strange things to me. I started talking to myself, sleeping at odd times, sitting doing nothing for hours on end.

Very late one night I broke the rules on a whim and switched on the radio in the kitchen. I twisted the dial and ended up with the BBC World Service, which I'd never much listened to before. After a while, I turned the knob some more. Listening to France-Inter and Europe 1 for the first time in years reminded me of how as a teenager I'd listen to long-wave, to strange foreign stations, with their adverts and funny languages, and dream of going to all these wonderful places where the sun shone all the time, where all sorts of adventures beckoned, where even the pop music was better, as you can't tell how banal the lyrics are if they're in a foreign language.

Next day, I started work. My *Fantasia in Long Wave* would capture the lure of distant places as heard by a young person listening to the radio, while its second half would be about the grown-up exile's longing for England on listening to the BBC World Service.

Alfred turned up as usual that evening, and as usual I was rustling up a plate of junk. He was back to wearing the tight black shorts. His tanned face, chest and back were covered in large white scabs, which he made sure I saw.

"Have the pox myself now," he said. "Be dead inside a few days..."

I sat down at the table with my fish fingers. He lotused on the table opposite my plate.

"Tell me," I said, "if it's possible for you to project yourself back in time, how come the world isn't crawling with visitors from the future?"

"Technology is still very new, and is strictly regulated so that the timeline isn't disrupted. Same as in your era governments regulate use of nuclear weapons," he said. "I'm only permitted to visit you to try and prevent catastrophe. I wish you could see all the suffering."

"Then why not show me? I'm sure you've got the technology."

Alfred scratched his nose (isn't that one of those telltale signs you're lying?), causing one of his facial scabs to fall off. The skin underneath seemed quite unblemished. It almost put me off my dinner.

"Genetic mutation, you say?"

"Right."

"I'd have thought that you people would be able to deal with all that stuff. Even now I understand we're getting pretty close to filtering out genes carrying congenital diseases and such..."

Alfred scratched his nose again. He stood up and wandered around the kitchen. He stared out of the window and absentmindedly whistled quietly to himself.

He was whistling a diminished "Lillibulero," just like the version I'd scribbled down as part of my *Fantasia* that morning.

Alfred had not heard me whistling it, or playing it. I was composing with pencil and paper. The melody he whistled hadn't existed in that form the last time

he saw me. It hadn't even been on my mind since the morning. The afternoon and early evening I'd spent wrestling with mental images of Merrie England and Vaughan-Williams, of Parry writing the music to "Jerusalem" on a church organ in the Cotswolds. I'd been worried it was starting to sound like a Conservative Party political broadcast.

Alfred sat opposite me again, more scabs falling off. He looked miserable.

"So tell me what's going on, Alfred," I said. "Tell me why, if my life is wasted and my work is worthless, you've just been whistling a tune I wrote? Better still, tell me how come it's only you who visits me? If I am killing millions, I think I'm at least entitled to a visit from the World President, or the Secretary-General of the United Nations, or the Pope, or whoever it is in charge of your world, and not just – no offence intended, pal – a student.

"And something else; if it's so important to mankind that I top myself, how come you're not better briefed? You know nothing at all about me, or the times in which I live. You think an assassin costs ten guineas, that the world is plagued by fundamentalist Anglican terrorists, or that I take all kinds of illegal drugs, you know very little about cigarettes and you don't even have a halfway intelligent plan for killing me.

"You see, Alfred, I didn't kill myself at first because I didn't want to die. Now I'm not going to kill myself because I don't believe you. I don't believe your candle-wax scabs, or this crap about the Black Death. I think you're mounting some kind of freelance operation. So are you going to tell me all about it – or what?"

He disappeared.

I didn't see Alfred for days. I got on with my life; signed on, played a gig, went to the pub a couple times, and started working out my score on a keyboard. I began to wonder if the whole thing had been an hallucination caused by depression, or bad diet.

Then, on the third Alfred-free night I woke up in a blind panic.

He hadn't given up at all!

He was trying to persuade my wife-to-be to kill herself! He was out there telling the woman I was going to love about the killer pox and how she owed it to the world to do herself in.

I didn't have a steady partner. The last one ran off with a man from the tax office 18 months ago. I had no idea who would mother the babies who'd carry Alfred's imaginary pestilence.

How do you track down your partner-to-be?? She might be someone I'd already met. Maybe she didn't even live in this country. It might be years yet before we met. She could be a friend of a friend. She could be a colleague in my next job. She could be someone I got talking to in a bus queue or in a lift, in a supermarket, a bookshop, at one of the Quartet's gigs, at a party... Hell, maybe we'd meet through a lonely-hearts column.

The horrible thing was that I didn't know if I could be bothered to go looking for her. I mean, it's very hard to care about someone you don't care about yet. As it were.

I considered phoning the Samaritans to ask if they'd had any female callers who were about to end

it all at the behest of a guy called Alfred. But they'd think it was me that needed help, not her. I could put a personal ad in the local paper, or even a national paper, but there was no guarantee she'd see it. I could telephone all my friends and acquaintances and ask them if they knew any suicidal women, but I couldn't work out how I'd explain my interest in the subject.

There was absolutely nothing I could do.

Unless ...

Unless ...

Heh-heh-heh!

Next morning, I went out and bought three tubes of Smarties.

Now I needed to talk to Alfred, he just wasn't around any more. For three days I tried shouting out his name during his usual visiting time, but he never showed.

So when he did appear at the end of the week, my instinct was to greet him joyously. But what I actually did was slump my shoulders, cough a lot and stumble weakly to the living-room sofa.

"She's not killed herself, has she?" I said, weakly.

"No. Told me to get stuffed, whatever that means."

I'd been right! That's my girl!! I thought.

"Leave her alone, Alfred. I'm going to do what you want. I'm going to end it all tonight."

"You are? But why?" He almost sounded alarmed.

"It's all gone wrong, Alfred. I don't have a job, I thought I could write music, but I can't. Yesterday morning, I queued for five hours to see the paupers' doctor. He says I've got consumption because of the beefburgers. It wouldn't be a problem, but Mrs Thatcher abolished the health service, and I'm destitute. I could live if I wanted to. I could probably borrow the money to go into a sanatorium, but as I'm sure you know we redundant systems analysts are a fiercely proud caste. Descended from warriors, you know..."

"Didn't know that, actually. Interesting."

"In a few days, the bailiffs will repossess my flat, and I'll have to beg on the streets. I can't go on. And since you want me dead as well, too, I might just as well get it over with. I've been waiting for you so I could tell you."

"Err..." said Alfred, "you want to think about this? Do you have counsellors back then?"

"No, Alfred," I smiled weakly, "I've decided. I'm going to night. I only have one small favour to ask of you."

"Yes?" said Alfred.

"Sit with me while I fade away. It won't take long. I don't want to die alone. It would mean a lot to me. You're the only real friend I have."

"Uh, yeah, sure." Alfred looked decidedly shifty.

On the coffee table beside the sofa I had prepared a glass of Vimto and a tablet bottle into which I'd put all the red Smarties. Next to these was the remote for the hi-fi.

I shovelled the Smarties into my mouth, and washed them down with Vimto. "Sleeping tablets and laudanum," I ad-libbed, and lay on the sofa. With the remote, I switched on the hi-fi to play my specially-prepared party tape of committing-suicide-to-music.

Closing my eyes, I tried to think myself into a relaxed a state as possible to slow my heartbeat just in case Alfred could monitor it. Through Finzi's *Dies*

*Natalis* I wittered aimlessly about childhood, love, death, the existence or not of God (etc.). I then started on about how much I loved music, and how I'd wanted to work in music. "Do you enjoy your work, Alfred?"

"Yes," he said.

"Tell me about the future, Alfred. What's the date where you are?"

"June 28th 2072."

I let some of Barber's *Adagio for Strings* fill the silence.

"Tell me about where you work," I said after a while. "Is it nice?"

"European University of Delft," he said. "Yes. Nice place. Not like these old English towns of yours. More grass and trees and water. People healthier and better-looking."

"You a research student?"

"Yes. Department of Philosophy, under Professor Brizon herself," he said, sounding proud.

"Won't be long now," I said as Fauré's *Requiem* kicked in. "One last favour, Alfred."

"Anything," he said. I had my eyes shut but could tell he was at the far end of the room, keeping away from looking at his handiwork.

"What was her name?"

"I really shouldn't tell... I mean, if you don't die, you could..."

I gasped, writhed and coughed a little. "Oh Lord," I said weakly, "I had no idea it would be this painful! Hope it's not too long, now. I'm sorry Alfred, I know I shouldn't have asked. It's just it would mean a lot to me..."

More silence. Suddenly, he said, "Must go. I'm sorry. Really I am. I shouldn't have asked this. I didn't know it'd be this disturbing."

*Now he tells me*, I'm thinking. "Her name... Alfred... Pleas... tell..." I whispered, breathing as shallowly as possible.

"Err, Joanne, Joanne Appleby," he said. "Farewell, and thanks."

After a long pause I permitted myself to peep out of one eye to make sure he had gone.

I leapt up, yelping and punching the air like a yuppie in a plastic razor advert. ("Yeass!! Yeass! Ha-ha! I've got you, you murdering swine! Fallen straight into my trap. Hook, line and sinker, suckered! You idiot! You fell for it! I won! etc."). I went over to the window, opened it and yelled to the whole street that I loved Joanne Appleby and that she was going to have my babies.

Then of course I remembered I didn't know any Joannes or Applebys, apart from an old bloke who drank at the Duke sometimes. Father Appleby the Catholic priest.

I got out my address book and phoned all my friends to ask if they knew any Joanne Applebys. I'd had a party at my place a couple of months previously and my cover story was that I'd only just got round to cleaning the flat (everyone believed that) and that I'd found this expensive-looking shoe with the name Joanne Appleby written in it. I was wondering, I said, if anyone had brought a friend of that name, because she'd surely want her footwear returned. None had, but seven people asked if she'd left at midnight saying her car-



riage was about to turn into a pumpkin.

Despite my failure, I went to bed feeling pleased with myself and fantasizing about what Joanne Appleby looked like, where she came from, what she did for a living...

Next morning, I went to my bank and settled with Alfred for good. Never mind his contrition the previous evening; he had tried to kill me. Now he was going to pay.

So was I. It cost me the last £20 in my account, and took all morning for several successively-more-senior bank staff to agree to my request.

Three days later, I got home one evening to find a woman standing in my living room looking at my books. She looked at least 70, and wore a tweed jacket and corduroy trousers.

"Professor Xaviera Brizon, European University of Delft," she said.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance," I said. "Um, do you normally dress like that?"

"No. I've only taken on this appearance to conform with historical ideas of what a professor looks like... I came to apologize, and to thank you," he said.

"No problem. You got my message then?"

"Yes. Alfred has been dismissed."

I don't know how much interest £20 would accumulate over almost 80 years, but I'd agreed with the bank that it would entirely revert to them on June 29th 2072 on condition that they got a message to Xaviera Brizon, Professor of Philosophy at the European University of Delft that her student Alfred was gaining unauthorized access to her time machine.

"So," I said. "Alfred was playing Sorcerer's Apprentice, did I guess right?"

"Correct," she said. "I will tell you nothing about the technology we are developing, although its intentions are benign. Alfred gained unauthorized entrance to the system. An unforgivable breach of security. In the wrong hands it has limitless potential for mischief, perhaps even to warp the space-time ecology of the galaxy. The project will be suspended."

"Why did Alfred want me dead?"

"I can't tell you that."

"You'd better, or I'll go back to the bank tomorrow and cancel my deal with them."

"No!" said the Professor, appalled, "you mustn't do that under any circumstances! If Alfred Smith were to continue with his unauthorized adventures there is no telling what damage he might do."

"The Alfred story, please."

She gave me a dirty look, sighed and said, "I understand that he and your great-grandson were rivals for the same woman. Your descendant made himself attractive to the girl partly through the seductive employment of your music, which I have to say I do not like at all. I find it too ironic and knowing, too ready to resort to other references without making strong statements of its own. I believe you call it post-modernism; I call it lack of moral courage."

"That's me all over. So did the best man win?"

"Your descendant and the girl are now performing your music in public, along with compositions of their

own. Alfred Smith believed he could win her back by preventing the birth both of his rival and of your music."

"The bastard! The scheming, conniving, lousy, stinking little piece of... Killing me's bad enough, but to kill my music too! Hanging's too bloody good for him! If he was here now I'd..."

"You must make some allowance for his youth and self-pity," said the Prof. "When the provost brought him to me this morning, he seemed relieved. He imagined it would be easy to kill someone from the past, but by the time of your pretended suicide, he realized that you were a fellow human being after all. He felt considerable guilt, even after he discovered you were still alive."

"I should bloody well think so," I said.

"I must go. I have told you much more than I should. Please leave the money with the bank. You could do great harm if you disturb it."

"Where do I find Joanne Appleby?"

"I have no idea. And if I did, I couldn't possibly tell you."

"I don't suppose there's any chance of you telling me this Saturday's Lottery numbers either, is there?"

But she had already gone.

"No," I said. "I spend my last 20 quid to save the universe, but it'd destroy the fabric of space-time if I won so much as a lousy tenner."

And so to the Bullshit Challenge. I've always entered in the past – with no success, and I didn't have any decent ideas for tall stories, so I decided to risk being booted off for being too long-winded and told everyone about Alfred.

I got a fair amount of heckling, but everyone wanted to hear it through. After a gruelling 15 minutes onstage, I was applauded and came down with a throat in desperate need of wetting.

In the ensuing half-hour, four different women came up to me and said their name was Joanne Appleby. Three of them I knew perfectly well were called nothing of the sort, while the fourth collapsed into uncontrollable giggling.

As the votes were being cast for best bullshitter, I went and joined Mike and the rest of the gang. I found myself sat next to a stunningly attractive young woman.

"This is my kid sister, Jane," said Mike, introducing us. "She's come to stay the weekend."

"I don't believe it," I said to her. "How come a short, fat, balding, ugly bloke like Mike has a supermodel for a sister?"

I didn't mean it as some corny chat-up line. The drink had made me blurt out exactly what I'd been thinking. And it was true – I could see no family resemblance between them. For a split second, they both looked awkwardly at one another. Then she laughed.

"I love Finzi's *Dies Natalis*, too," she said. "But I never had it down as music to kill yourself to. I rather imagined it as the sort of tune some people would play when giving birth. I think I would."

We started talking about music. She laughed at my pathetic jokes. I laughed at her jokes. She yelled and cheered with the rest of them when I went up to collect my trophy from the Baron and thanked my agent,

the producer, my co-stars and all the little people who had made it possible.

Back at the table, it was me and Jane, Jane and me. She was smart, she was funny, we liked the same music, films and books. When the others said they were going to get a pizza, we said we'd catch up with them.

After they called time at the bar, we went out into the cool evening air.

"I had thought that Alfred was an hallucination," she said, as we walked towards the restaurant to join the others.

"Eh!?"

"I had a really bad dose of 'flu. Not the cold that most people call flu, but the full-on shivers, shakes and delirium thing," she said. "This bloke came to me when I was in my sick-bed, trying to persuade me to kill myself. I thought he was the angel of death, or something, so I told him to get stuffed."

I could have stopped in my tracks, or stared at her, or something. Instead, I walked on calmly, with a weird feeling in the pit of my stomach. The only other time I'd felt like this before was in the moments before my horse was about to cross the line, winning me £100.

"So, um, who's Joanne Appleby?" I asked, nonchalantly.

"I thought that Mike would tell you, but obviously he doesn't remember. He knows I was adopted as a

baby, of course. Joanne Appleby is the name on my birth certificate."

"Well," I said, as she took my arm, "what shall we call our first-born?"

"Not Alfred, that's for sure... Do you still want to go to that restaurant?"

"Not really," I said. "Perhaps you'd like to perhaps come back to my place, and maybe listen to some music, have a cup of coffee, and..."

"Okay, just as long as you understand that I'm a nice girl and don't get up to any hanky-panky on a first date."

"Why?" I sniggered. "We're fated to reproduce. What's the point in delaying?"

She slapped me, but came back to my place anyway.

**Eugene Byrne** rode high in our readers' popularity polls with his previous stories, "Cyril the Cyberpig" (issue 66) and "Bagged 'n' Tagged" (issue 101). His collaborations with Kim Newman in the "USSA" series have also been popular. He lives near Bristol.

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# Neal Stephenson

interviewed by

David V. Barrett

*Neal Stephenson is known for two astonishingly innovative and detailed novels,*

*Snow Crash (1992) and The Diamond Age (1995).*

*When I caught up with him, it was mid-afternoon in the restaurant of the London hotel where he was staying; he was sitting in a corner, alone, tucking into a huge club sandwich. The publicity people at Viking*

*Penguin had arranged countless interviews, signing sessions and radio appearances throughout that week; the only thing they'd forgotten was to programme in lunch breaks. We talked for an hour while*

*he ate his sandwich and the kitchen and restaurant staff hustled around us; the sound of their chatter and the clattering of crockery as*

*they laid the tables was almost drowned out by the off-duty turned-up muzak. They and we ignored each other. It could have been a*

*set-piece scene from any cyberpunk novel.*



*Barrett: How do you feel about being called a cyberpunk author?*

**Stephenson:** I don't get particularly troubled by that kind of labelling; it's sort of obvious that it's simple-minded and one-dimensional to slap labels on people. When it first happens to you it can be irksome, but I think that once you spend a bit of time in the publishing business you figure out that the labels are just a handy tool that the marketing people and others use to simplify the difficult process of getting the right books to the right people. I think that all that's being said when people use the word cyberpunk, it's a codeword saying, "if you are the sort of person who likes Gibson and Sterling's work, then there's a fairly good chance that you'll like this too." I was just at an event where they were going out of their way to call it "cyber-noir," because I think they were afraid I would be offended if they used cyberpunk.

*Had you read people like Gibson before you started work on Snow Crash? Was it a deliberate decision to*

*write in that sort of idiom, or was it just that you wrote the book how you wanted to write it?*

I wouldn't quite say that it was deliberate. I used to read a lot of science fiction when I was a kid, then I stopped when I was in my 20s, because it seemed to me that it had gotten kind of stale, I wasn't getting much out of what I read; there were other things to read that sort of paid me back more. Then when I happened across *Neuromancer* I was just stunned by it, because it was a real novel, he was writing a real, honest-to-God novel with a highly-developed literary style, and dealing with some really interesting ideas, not just "Let's build a warp-drive and go to the Andromeda Galaxy" — ideas that had to do with politics and society, and they were grounded here on Earth in the human world. The appearance of *Neuromancer* forcibly brought home to me that you could write science fiction but it could be really good literature and — for lack of a better word — it could be really, really cool. So that got me thinking about trying to do something with sf again. I'd read a massive amount of it when I was a kid; I'd always thought it was my home base in literature, even though I had wandered away from it. So that gave me the notion that, what the hell, it appears that sf is not dead after all, why don't I have a go at it?

*You did two novels before Snow Crash. Two that were published; several that were not! The Big U was campus comedy, somewhat soft-mark satirical humour about a big, nasty university. That one had its moments. The second one was Zodiac, which was an ecological thriller, about an environmental detective in Boston Harbour; it was basically a new twist on the well-known form of the hardboiled detective story. It's a fun book. Both The Big U and Zodiac are arguably science fiction, but neither one of them happened to be published as such. Between these I spent a few years trying to write a pretty big science-fiction book that never really fell together, you know, it didn't coalesce; it kept morphing into different forms. There were a couple of ideas from that that eventually made their way into Snow Crash.*

*Most of the critics thought that Snow Crash was a much better book than Gibson's Virtual Light, which came out from the same publisher and around the same time; it was much more detailed, and Virtual Light was basically just a cop story — and he gets all the glory...*

*I've got all the glory I need, or want.*

*If Gibson is the father of cyberpunk,*

most cyberpunk novels are sons of *Neuromancer*, using the same ideas, the same visual imagery, and so on. You seemed to step aside from that, and made your own attack on the idea.

Gibsonian cyberspace is a three-dimensional interface designed for doing engineering work on the global information system, and can be hacked to do espionage or whatever. It serves that purpose admirably; it seems entirely reasonable. The Metaverse is an entertainment thing, it's a pop-culture thing. It's what would happen if the big movie studios got their hands on that sort of technology, and wanted to make as much money as possible. In *Snow Crash* most of the characters are relatively sophisticated people, so they tend to go to relatively sophisticated parts of the Metaverse, but I've tried to suggest that most of the place is just sort of video arcades, and noisy and garish, aimed for mass consumption. So it's just two different takes, two different applications, of the same underlying technology.

*I love the idea of your 65,536-kilometre highway; why do it that way rather than a sprawling city?*

It's modelled after the way real-estate development happens in the real world — ribbon development — and if you've got unlimited space and no oceans to get in the way, then the logical extreme of that is a ribbon that goes all the way around the world. It's possible to imagine some system, some shape of the space, some system of development that would be more homogeneous, no real variations in the density of the development, but that's not interesting, and in a way it's not useful. There are certain applications that want to be in an extremely dense downtown quarter; there are others that want to spread out into the middle of nowhere in cheap territory. So if you were to do it in this way, with a street all the way around the planet, then as you went towards the poles you would have large amounts of unexploited space that could be useful for that kind of development. Also, if you're doing 3D graphics, and you're rendering an image, and it's on a plane, then you've got to trace the lines of sight from the pupil of the virtual observer to infinity, and you've got to look forever at an object that intersects those lines, and render it; on the other hand, if you're doing it on a sphere, then you only need to trace it as far as the horizon. Anything beyond the horizon you can't see, so you don't have to worry about it. So it's computationally more efficient to have the thing on a sphere.

*Where did the idea of using the Sum-*

*rian language and religion come from? Was this a long-term interest?* I'd been working on the concept of a metavirus, tied up with the concept of an infocalypse for a long time. I had to work out, where did the metavirus come from? Originally I thought it would be something that some hacker came up with, as part of an informational warfare project. I played with that for a long time. I also thought about having it be something that came from space, since it is just pure information, so it propagates across space without worrying about relativistic effects, it theoretically propagates from one inhabited solar system to another; if it infected a planet then it would get broadcast from all of its radio and television before the planet was destroyed. I was thinking about all of these things, and then when I was right in the middle of writing the book I happened to go back to my home town in Iowa, I was there for a wedding, and my brother-in-law-to-be was there, who was a doctoral student in Theology at Edinburgh, and the subject of his work was certain Ugaritic inscriptions, and in particular some myths relating to Asherah, who may have gone by a different name there, but anyway, the same goddess. He started talking about the Babel myth and a few other related subjects, and it came to me that this might be a good way to introduce the concept of this informational virus; and it had the further advantage that it didn't need to rule out the outer-space explanation, since these people spent a lot of time watching the stars, maybe they had caught the virus that way. I was living right across the river from Washington DC at the time, so I just started going to the Library of Congress and reading up on the subject. When I started looking into it I found that it dovetailed into what I was doing more perfectly than I ever could have hoped for. So I didn't have to make anything up; all of the stuff in *Snow Crash* about the me, and the conflicts between the gods and so on, is from actual research.

*The cover of The Diamond Age shows a hand holding a mouse by its tail, a reference to the Chinese girls in the book who are called the Mouse Army.*

I'm just delighted with the cover; it's a gem. It's pretty common for publishers to try to include everything that's in the book on the cover, and it can make for really busy, cluttered covers, but this, it just nailed it. It came as a complete, and wonderful surprise. I never would've come up with something like that.

*Within The Diamond Age you have another book, A Young Lady's Illus-*

**Cyberpunk**

trated Primer, this gorgeous idea of an interactive book that grows with the kid, beginning with simple English, and starting off with concepts, and teaching her to read, and being both an encyclopedia and a companion, a guide, and mentor, and mother, and all the rest — it's a combination of a children's Encyclopedia Britannica and a *Teddy bear*.

I'd been seeing a lot of children's literature in the last few years, and it's interesting to see how carefully it's geared to particular stages in a child's development. Even when you have a new-born baby you can buy a mobile to hang above the crib, that is made up of these extremely simple and geometric shapes, and a month later you're supposed to throw those away and put in new cards that give a somewhat more highly-resolved image, and it continues on from there all the way up to adult literature and adult art. It made me think of the concept of fractal geometry where, say you were rendering a picture of an imaginary mountain, you might start out with a very simple geometric shape which would give you its rough outlines as seen from a great distance, but as you got closer you would perturb the shape and give it higher resolution, so that it would be the same shape but it would take on more complexity, until you could go and become lost in a canyon or something, and you could spend years exploring it. I thought it would be kind of an interesting thought experiment to try that with art and with stories instead of with a geometric shape. And then a lot of the other features of the thing followed from that — okay, if we're going to build one of these, what do we need in the way of technology? To make a long story short, we're going to have to have nanotech. Okay, so I'm going to have to write a book about nanotech, fine. What if some other kid tries to steal it? We can't have that, so it's gotta have some system for knowing when it's being stolen and escaping from the grip of the bad kid... Once the premise is laid out, a lot of the other stuff follows pretty logically from thinking about the way that Hackworth, the nanotech engineer, would have thought about it.

*Is it a theoretically infinite book?*  
I don't think we could say that, because there would have to be a finite limit to its internal circuitry. The book does observe the child's environment, and it can respond to that.

*But you couldn't feed into it newspaper headlines, current affairs, for the book to keep abreast of?*  
No, to my view it would need to be a

somewhat more timeless product; in a certain sense the myths and stories that it's built on are the sort of hoiled-down skeleton and gristle of everything human beings have ever done, and so new events which are happening today don't really have any bearing on it. There is nothing new under the sun, and all that.

*The concept of having a fantasy novel inside a science-fiction novel, the fantasy quest interactive story, with all the familiar lines (and also, as the internal story develops, the less familiar things, the computer ideas and so on); you've written a couple of unpublished fantasy novels; I wondered whether your next book might be a fantasy novel?*

I really need the grounding in technology; that's where all my stuff begins. I suppose any book that deals a lot with technology, that's going to be a science-fiction novel by definition. One of my grandfathers



was a physics professor, the other was a biochemistry professor, my father's an electrical engineering professor, several of my uncles are in engineering or hard sciences. I grew up in a university town, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, so the parents of all my little childhood chums were all PhDs in physics or chemistry or something. So that kind of spirit completely suffused that city. Of course I didn't realize that; wherever you grow up, you think that's normal. So then I studied physics in college, and also geography, just because they were doing a lot of computer stuff then,

which gave me a chance to do that. So I've been submerged in a highly technical background ever since the day I was born.

*All the nanotech stuff, the espionage, the spying, the viruses, the zapping each other, everywhere you are you're surrounded by tiny microscopic spies; how far is that from anything which could be projected from current reality?*

I tried to base it all pretty carefully on a book called *Nanosystems* by Dr K. Eric Drexler, he's the real leading exponent of nanotech, and the other leading exponent at the moment is Dr Ralph Merkle — there's actually a building named after Merkle in *The Diamond Age*. It passed muster with both of those guys. Merkle's one complaint about it is that he doesn't think that real systems would be dependent upon a central feed, or that there's no technical reason for them to be built that way. I have no doubt that he's right, but I did it that way for a social rather than a technical reason: even if they didn't have to be built that way, people would claim that they had to be built that way, in order to exercise some central control, and also in order to be able to extract any profit from the whole thing.

*The social ideas in the book are in some ways more remarkable than the nanotech ideas: the different philes, non-geographical nations, self-choosing tribes, all overlapping, interwoven... Why choose that particular form of society?*

That just seems to be the way that things are going; it's my best guess as to how things are going to end up. It seems more plausible to me than any other future organization of society. There's a good book by a fellow named Joel Kotkin, which is called simply *Tribes*, which is about this, it's a really good illustration of a lot of this. I try to keep an ear to the ground and to do a lot of reading on current events, because they're always surprising, you know, and so it's certainly the case that things that I read, whether it's in newspapers or in occasional books, it all goes into the hopper...

*In some ways, I suppose, the undersea Drummers in this book are the Jungian collective unconscious?*  
Made flesh, yeah. That's probably the most succinct way to describe it. It's also sort of Internet made flesh.

*An unholy combination! I mentioned earlier on about having a book within a book; in a sense you're writing metafiction, but without the usual very arch, intellectual, "I'm writing metafiction" pose. You're doing a simi-*

lar thing, but not in that way. I think that gets pretty annoying to all of us. A bit of that is the essential innocence and naivete that's supposed to be embodied in literature for young people. In that market it's perfectly all right to be sincere. You don't have to be snide and arch in order to demonstrate to the reader how clever you are. I have a friend who is a trial lawyer, and a very good one, and he says that when he's going into a trial against an attorney he hasn't faced before, if it's a clever attorney he's not alarmed by that, and if it's a clever attorney who demonstrates that he's clever, then he knows that it's going to be all right, because the real formidable opponent is the clever attorney who doesn't feel any need to demonstrate how clever he is.

*Did you have fun in bouncing the two off each other when you were writing this book, the very traditional fantasy story and the outer tale?*

Yeah, because it gives you a break from doing one kind of thing, you can switch over to this completely other mode, so it's always refreshing to do that. It was pretty much written in one order. When I started I thought I had a plan for how the book within the book was going to work out, but that ended up jumping the rails and developing in its own organic way as time went on, which is how it always goes with me; I've gotten used to that. I don't like revising, so I try to organize my work in such a way that, to the extent possible, I get it right the first time. So I try only to write when I'm really fresh, and seem to be doing good work, and I always make myself stop after a couple of hours, before I start writing zilch. It took me many years to figure that out. Having figured that out, I don't produce such a volume of slag any more, so I don't have to go through and laboriously edit it out. I never do word-counts, but typically I'll go for two or three hours, from when I wake up until maybe 10.30 or 11 in the morning; now that just refers to the production of original prose; there are many other things like reading and so on that can be done at other times of the day.

*Apart from these two sf novels, and the two earlier books, have you done anything else?*

My uncle and I write novels together, under the pseudonym of Stephen Bury. We're writing mainstream, commercial, techno-thriller type of fiction, just for the hell of it. *Interface* was published in 1994 by Bantam in the States; it's been bought by Penguin UK. We've spent a lot of time, since my finishing *The Cobweb*, work-

ing on our second one, *The Cobweb*; that's going to be out in the States this summer. Then I've been working on a CD-Rom project with a Seattle company; it's called *Daymare*. We call it a game amongst ourselves; people have come up with a lot of euphemisms, but they've all got 20 or 30 syllables, so we just call it a game, but we hope that it will not be what's called a "twitch game," but be a piece of art. It may or may not happen, but we're hoping that it might swing into production.



*Do you do short stories?*

I'm not very good at it. I think it's as different from writing novels as doing sculpture is from playing in a symphony orchestra. I find it admirable when people can do both; for example, Bruce Sterling can, and he can write non-fiction. I have knocked off maybe two readable short stories in my life, and I don't really try to write them; I think I've got it pretty well worked out that it's not my thing.

*Have you collaborated with anyone else in the sf world? Do you have plans to?*

No. I think one of the reasons it works with my uncle is that he's in a completely different world; he's a history professor, and he writes history books, so it's a completely complementary relationship. Likewise with *Daymare*, I'm working with an artist friend of mine, and again we work together well because we're doing

entirely different things. I don't think I would last very long in a collaboration with another fiction writer — or they wouldn't last very long!

*Presumably since Snow Crash you've been hauled along to conventions and things?*

I don't go to conventions. It just leads to excessive self-consciousness which I think is a hindrance to writing. After the ten-thousandth person has come up to you and asked you where you get your ideas, you may begin to wonder where you do get them, and

I'm afraid that at that point I won't have them any more. I don't have anything against conventions, I just don't think it's advisable for me to go to them.

*Finally, would you say that in either of these books there's any sort of moral or religious worldview, either that's deliberate on your part, or that the books themselves created?*

I'm inclined to be just as sceptical of scientific rationalism as I am of television evangelism; I hope that comes through. We had true religion until the 20th century, and people were killing each other right and left, and then we said, "This religion must be causing all of this bad behaviour, let's get rid of it and replace it with something else," and we did, and then we killed each other ten times as fast. So I'm not too crazy about either extreme, and that might come through. Some people have read *Snow Crash* as a complete attack on all religions, which is not really the case; it's an attack on brainless religion. Whether or not you believe in any particular religious creed, I think it's possible to see empirically that cultures in which people have clear notions of right and wrong, and transmit them on to their kids, seem to be healthier for children, and consequently for adults, than ones which are completely devoid of any standards.

*In A Young Lady's Illustrated Primer the moral standards are to bring somebody up to think for themselves, but to consider others. I found The Diamond Age a very moral book. In the back of the book there's a very strange computer-enhanced photo; is that you?*

It's dreadful! The original photo is dreadful; I think they were trying to conceal its dreadfulness by rendering it unrecognizable.

*It looks rather like Philip K. Dick shortly before he died... Maybe after he died!*

# Cages

*Ed Gorman*

**H**e knows the bad thing will happen, the way it always happens, his father coming home late and all dreamdusted up and his mother shrieking and screaming about how he spent all the money on the dreamdust and then the —

He knows when to pull the pillow over his head so he will not hear when his father slams his mother into the wall and starts hitting her.

Sometimes he tries to stop it but it never does any good. He is three foot six and has only one arm and is no match at all for his father.

Then in the room next to his, in the darkness, after the hitting and the screaming, there are other sounds not on the bed, grunts and sighs and whimpers and then

Sleep.

A dream.

His mother and father and himself in a new car riding down the street. People pointing at them. Envious. Such a nice family. The envious people do not even seem to notice his bald head or his lone shrivelled arm or the way the sticky stuff runs from his ear and

Awake.

Late night.

Sirens.

Laser blasts.

Coppers hunting down dreamduster gangs.

He wants to kill the man who invented dreamdust. All the misery it causes. Mrs Caruso's daughter letting all those men stick themselves up the slit between her legs. Mr Feinmann smashing his wife's head in with a bottle because she wouldn't give him the tips from her waitress job. Little Betty Malloy being killed by the dreamduster who put a broomhandle up her backside and then cut her up with a butcher knife.

Night.

Hot.

Goes out on the fire escape.

Tomorrow it will just start again. The argument about you fucking cunt where'd all the money go? And her shrieking you dreamdust fucker you dreamdust fucker!

Always: money money money.

And then he remembers the commercial on the vid. Seen that commercial a lot the last five six weeks. And always has the same thought.

\$

\$

flashing on the screen and this real loud guy telling you how you can collect them.

All you gotta do see is

Be so easy.

So fucking easy.

And then they'd have plenty of \$.

No more fighting.

No more hitting.

He lies on the fire escape thinking about tomorrow morning. His mother will be gone to work and so will he.

No trouble going to the closet where

And getting a sack

And

Going down to the place it says in the commercial

And

He can see all those fuckers who pick on him and hit him and call him faggot and mutant and all that shit.

He can see them standing enviously on the corner when he cruises by on the back seat of his parents' new car.

Fuck you

You're a faggot

You're the mutant

Not me

Fuckers

And yes yes won't they be sorry and yes yes won't they be envious.

He wishes it was tomorrow morning already.

Bitch can't even fix me my fuckin' breakfast? You know how fuckin' hard I work on that fuckin' dock you cunt?

Early morning battle

Father slamming out heading for the choppy dark waters on this muggy overcast day.

Mother not long behind him.

Coming in and leaning down to his bed and giving him this wet perfume kiss and still crying from the early morning battle and because she got clipped a good one on the right cheekbone even a little bruise there

And him going fitfully back to sleep

And dreaming the car dream again

And dreaming about going to see this doctor who fixes him up so he looks just like the fuckers who pick on him all the time

Hey Quasimodo they say sometimes

Hey hunchbacka Notre Dame you little faggot

And is awake now

And in the bathroom taking down the underwear his mother always washes out at night him only having the one pair but no amount of washing taking the brown stains from the back or the yellow from the front

And then moving fast

Afraid one of them might pop back in and see what he's doing and

With his sack he hurries from the apartment

Horns and exhaust fumes and perfume and farts and fat people and skinny people and people talking to themselves and dreamdusters and gangs and whores and faggots and

And he's hurrying fast as he can down his little street carrying his little sack and he makes it no more than half a block when he sees Ernie that fucking Ernie wouldn't you know

And nigger Ernie steps in front of him and says What shit you got there in that sack?

Is scared. Isn't sure what to say. Ernie is real real tall with gold teeth and knuckles that feel like sharp rocks when they hit your skull.

Takin back some popsies. You know get the refund.

Popsies shit. That ain't popsies in that sack, you little fuckin mutant.

Then Gil then Bob then Mike are there all friends of Ernie two of them be white but no matter they're every bit as mean as Ernie himself

And Mike grabs for the sack and says gimme it you little faggot

Hunchbacka Notre Dame Bob says

You heard him Ernie says give it to him

Just a plain brown sack but you can see stains on the sides of it now damned thing leaking from inside

Thinks he's gonna get a clear run for it starts to weave and wobble between them

But then Gil and Mike grab him by the shoulders and throw him up against the building and

Ernie grabs the sack from him

And smiles with his gold teeth

And holds the sack teasing up real high

And says you can have it faggot if you can jump this high

And he starts to cry but stops himself knowing that will only make it worse

Fuckin Ernie anyway

Nigger Ernie

Hey asshole Mike says look inside

So Ernie does

Turns away And holds the sack down

And opens it up

Holy shit

What's wrong?

Man, you gotta see what's in this sack, man.

So Gil takes a look. And he makes the same kinda sick face that Ernie did. Aw God. I wanna puke.

He's afraid they'll do something to it. He keeps thinking of the place he saw on the commercial. He wants to be there now. Getting his money.

You just bring 'em right down here for more cash \$\$\$ than you ever seen in your life. You just ask for Smilin' Bob. That's me.

And reaches out to snatch the sack back.

And gets hit fullfist by Mike.

Please c'mon you guys please

Doesn't want to start crying.

And then they start throwing the sack back and forth over their heads.

Fuckers you fuckers he cries running back and forth between them.

And then he sees the cop, an android, not a real person, android coppers being the only kind they'll send to a shithole like this one

And the android senses something wrong so he comes over

And of course Ernie and the others split because androids always want to ask a lot of questions being programmed to do just that and all, and people like Ernie and Gil always having something to hide and never wanting to answer questions

They drop his sack on the ground and take off running.

He bends and picks it up and then he starts running, too. He doesn't like androids any better than Ernie does.

He keeps his sack pulled tight.

By the time he gets to Smilin' Bob's, the rain has started, dirty hot city rain summer rain dirty summer rain, and he's drenched.

And there's a line all the way out the front door and all the way down the block.

People of all ages and descriptions holding boxes and sacks and bags. And the things inside them making all kinds of squeals and groans and moans and grunts and cries. And smelling so bad sometimes he thinks he's gonna puke or pass out.

And then this guy dressed all in yellow with this big-ass laser gun dangling from the same hand bearing the fat sparkly pinkie ring, he keeps walking up and down the long line saying, If you got somethin' dangerous, you let us know in advance, folks, cause otherwise we'll just have to kill the thing right on the spot unless you warn us about it. He says this in both English and Spanish. And then just keeps walking up and down up and down saying it over and over and over again.

All the time raining its ass off.

All the time getting bumped and pushed and kicked because he's so little.

All the time his sack wiggling and wriggling trying to get free.

There's a lot of talk in line:

How this one guy heard about this other guy who brought in this little sack to Smilin' Bob's and two days later the fucker was a millionaire.

How this one guy heard about this other guy he's waitin' in line here just like now ('cept it ain't rainin' in this here particular story) and this fuckin' thing comes right up outta this other guy's sack and kills the first guy right on the spot, goes right for his throat and tears it right out.

How this one guy heard about this other guy said that he had two of them once that ate each other — just like cannibals you know what I'm sayin' — but then they'd puke each other back up whole and start all over again. No shit. I swear onna stack of Bibles and my pappy's grave. True facts. Puked each other up and started all over again.

Finally finally finally the rain still raining and the thing in his sack still crying, he reaches the head of the line and goes inside.

First one this fat girl, they say no.

What you do inside is stand in another line and when you're first up they take your sack or your box from you and carry it inside this room that's bright with a special kind of lighting and they half close the door and they talk among themselves except Smilin' Bob himself who stands at the head of the line sayin' You folks jes relax we're getting to ya as fast as we can. He's got up just like on TV big-ass ten-gallon hat and western-style shirt and string tie and downhome accent.

And when they're done with the fat girl's bag this tall pale guy comes out and shakes his head and says sorry ma'am just won't do us no good.

Fucker you fucker you know how bad I need this money? she shrieks.

But Smilin' Bob jes kinda leans back and says No call for talkin' that way to Butch here no call at all.

And the fat girl goes away.

And a black kid steps up and they take his box and they go inside the blinding bright room and lights flash and male voices mutter and they come back out and hand him the box and the tall pale one is wiggling and wagging his hand sayin' that little fucker bit me you want me to I'll kill him for you kid. We got an easy way of doin' it kid won't hurt the little fucker at all.

But the kid snatches the box back and takes off all huffy and pissed because there's no money in it for him.

And next and next and next and next and finally his turn

Is scared

Knows they're not going to take it.

Knows he won't get no money.

Knows that his dad'll beat the shit out of his mom tonight soon as they start arguin' about money and dreamdust and shit like that.

Smilin' Bob takes the sack and peeks inside and makes the same face Ernie did and says Well well well

and my my my and I'll be jiggered I'll just be jiggered and then hands the sack over to the tall pale assistant

Who takes it inside the bright room and starts all the usual stuff lights flashing meters clicking voices mumbling and muttering and

Holy shit

That's what the guy inside says:

Holy shit. Lookit that friggin meter.

Smilin' Bob he hears it too and he looks back over his shoulder and then back at him and winks.

Maybe you dun brung Smilin' Bob somethin special.

I sure hope so Smilin' Bob.

And Smilin' Bob smiles and says: I give you a lotta money, what y'all gonna do with it anyways?

Give it to my dad and mom.

Well ain't that sweet.

He's a dreamduster and they fight all the time and I'm scared some night he's gonna kill her and maybe if I get enough money and give it to my mom maybe they won't have to argue any more and

The door opens

Tall pale guy comes out

Walks right over to Smilin' Bob and whispers something in his ear

And Smilin' Bob real solemn like nods and then comes over and puts his hand on his shoulder and leads him away from the line

You know how much we're gonna give you? Smilin' Bob asks.

He's excited: How much?

\$500!

\$\$\$\$\$\$

Just like on the commercial.

That's all he can think of

\$\$\$\$\$\$

How happy his mom will be

How proud his mom will be

No more arguments

No more beatings for anybody

\$\$\$\$\$\$

Oh thank you Smilin' Bob thank you

One hour and twenty eight minutes later he's on his way home. No sweat with Ernie and those fuckers. Rainin' too hard. They're inside.

Wants to beat Mom home

Wants to be sittin there this big grin on his face

And all this money sittin right on the table

And wants to see her face

See her smile

And say oh honey oh honey now me'n your dad we won't have to argue no more.

Oh honey

Which is just where he is when she comes through the door

Right at the table

And which is just what he's doing

Counting out the money so she's sure to see it

\$\$\$\$\$

And at first she's so tired she doesn't even notice it Just comes in all weary and all sighs and says think I gotta lay down hon I'm just bushed

And starts draggin herself past him into the little

living room with all the smashed-up furniture from the last couple of fights

And then she notices

Out of the corner of her eye

Says: Hey, what's that?

Money

Aw shit honey them cops they'll beat you sure as shit they catch you stealin like that

Didn't steal it Ma honest

Comes closer to the table and sees just how much is there: Aw honey where'd you ever get this much money?

And he tells her

And she says: You what?

Sold it

Sold it! It ain't an "it" for one thing it's your sister

Ain't my sister he says (but already he's feeling hot and panicky and kinda sick; not turnin out the way he planned not at all) ain't nobody's sister she's just this little –

And she slaps him

And he can't believe how terrible and rotten everything has turned out

Where's her smile?

Where's her sayin they won't argue no more?

Where's her sayin what a good boy he is?

She fuckin slaps him

Slaps him the way the old man always slaps him

And after he did so good too

Gettin' the money and all

Slaps him!

Then she's really on him

Shakin' him and slappin' him even harder

Where is she? Where is she?

Smilin' Bob's got her he says

Who's Smilin' Bob

He's the guy on TV Ma

SHE'S YOUR SISTER YOU STUPID LITTLE BASTARD! CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND THAT SHE'S YOUR OWN FLESH AND BLOOD! Now you take me to see this Smilin' Bob.

Never seen her like this

Not even when the old man beats her

All crazy screamin and fidgetin and cryin

Grabs him and pulls him up from the chair and says:

Take me to this Smilin' Bob and right now.

And so they stumble out into the early night

And

On the way she explains things again even though he can't seem to understand them: sixty years ago bad people put bad things into the river and ever since then some of the babies have been strange and sad and sometimes even frightening creatures, some babies (like his sister) being born so ugly that they had to hide them from the government, which is why they kept his little sister in the spare room because word would get around the neighbourhood and government agents might find out and would kill the little girl

But she isn't a little girl he says she don't even look like a little girl

(His mother hurrying down the streets now, hurrying and jerking him along)

And these Smilin' Bob fuckers (she says) what they do is they take in these babies and the ones they think

are telepathic (or something else worth study) they sell to the government or private labs to study. They wouldn't paid you no \$500 unless they thought she was gonna bring em a lot back.

The rain has stopped. Night has come. A chill night. The neon streets shine blue and yellow and green with neons. The freaks and the geeks are back pan-handling.

As she hurries hurries

And (she says) You was lucky and don't you ever forget it. You was lucky, the way you was born I mean, you wasn't normal but you wasn't like your sister. Nobody would'a taken you away like they would'a.

And then she starts to cry again

Which is the weird thing as they hurry along

How she keeps shifting in and out of sobbing and tears and curses

One minute she'll be all right talking to him and then she just goes crazy again

You shouldn't'a fuckin done it you shouldn't'a fuckin done it over and over and over again.

Without the long lines (and in the night) Smilin' Bob's looks very different, long shadows and soft street light hiding the worst of the graffiti

And

You show me the door you went in

Right there Ma

And she goes up and peers inside

And then goes crazy again

Banging and kicking on the door

And screaming you gimme my little girl back you fuckers you gimme my little girl back

And is crying again of course

Sobbing screaming keening

And banging and kicking and banging and kicking and

Just the darkness inside

Just the silence

You gimme my little girl back

And then

She runs around back and all he can do is follow Alley very dark smelling awful as they pass a dumpster

She opens the dumpster lid and peeks inside and

Screams

Freaks and geeks of every kind inside the rejects that they thought they could sell but couldn't

Half-cat half-baby things with one cyclopean eye in the middle of their forehead things with a flipper-like little arm sticking out of their sternums things that are doll-like little replicas of human beings except in the open eyes (even dead) you can see their stone madness

And every one of them had been hidden by their mothers till some stupid family member decided to earn some extra money by coming down to Smilin' Bob's or some place just like it and sell off the family shame

And you didn't have to be legal age because Smilin' Bobs all got together in Washington and had a bill passed sayin' any family member at all of any age could bring in these mutants and

They lay like fish piled high in a net these dump-

ster mutants moonlight glistening in their bloody faces and limbs and the stench

Then she runs to the back door which doesn't even have a window to peer in and starts banging and kicking again

You fuckers you fuckers

And him going up to her now and sayin

Ma I'm sorry Ma please don't be like this it scares me when you get like this

And she turns on him and shrieks

She's your little sister! Can't you understand that!

And she turns back to the doors and starts banging and kicking again

And then something startling happens

Door opens

And Smilin' Bob is standin there and

Evenin ma'am he says (in his Texas way) help you ma'am?

You bought my little girl today. You give my boy here \$500. I wanna give it back to you and take my little girl home.

And Smilin' Bob takin' off his white ten-gallon hat and scratchin' his head says Well now, lemme get a better look at this young 'un here

And he opens the door and looks down and says 'fraid not ma'am 'fraid I never did see this here kid before and I'd certainly remember if I had, givin' him \$500 Yankee cash and all like you said

Tell him (she says) tell him

And so he tells him

How he waited so long in line

How everybody ahead of him got turned down

How he got \$500

But Smilin' Bob he just looks down at him and nods his head and says Oh yeah, now I remember you. You brung that teeny tiny girl with three eyes.

She pushes the money at him.

Please take it.

'fraid I can't ma'am. Deal's a deal, least where I come from.

I just want her back

'fraid she's gone ma'am.

Gone?

Lab guy, he just happened to pop by and we showed her to him and - well, he took her.

You liar.

No call for that kinda language, ma'am.

You fuckin' fuckin' liar is what you are. She's in there ain't she?

And suddenly hurls herself at Smilin' Bob and tries to get past him

And he flings himself at her tryin to get her off Smilin' Bob but as he grabs out he feels Smilin' Bob's arm and

Smilin' Bob is an android!

But Smilin' Bob is also something else besides - a very pissed off citizen hitting an alarm button to the right of the door

She just keeps trying to get inside

Kickin' scratchin' hittin' even bitin' (but with android flesh bitin' don't matter much)

And then footfalls in the night

Jackboots

Two three four of them maybe

Comin' real fast

And then surrounding them there in the alley

Four android coppers, lasers pulled and ready to blast and

Two of the coppers go up and pull her off Smilin' Bob

Sure glad you boys got here

She hurt you Smilin' Bob?

Little lady like that? Not likely (Smilin' Bob smilin' about it all) but sure would appreciate it if you'd get her out of here so I could get some work done

You bet we will Smilin' Bob (and some kind of look exchanged some kind of murky android look that no human could ever understand) and the coppers pull her even further away from the door as Smilin' Bob goes back inside

She your ma (one of the coppers says)

Uh-huh.

Then we're gonna put her in your custody. You understand?

Yessir.

We're gonna give you a pill.

A pill?

(Android nods) She gets all crazy again, you give her this. You understand?

Yessir.

You think you can handle this?

Yessir.

We already gave her a little juice with a stun needle.

Yessir.

So she's calmer now. But if she should happen to get-Yessir. This here pill.

The coppers nod and leave.

Halfway home the rain starts up again but this time it's just a mist and the black streets shine with blue neon and red neon and yellow neon and in the shabby little rooms and holes and hallways you can hear the human music of conversation and laughter and crying and sex.

His mother walks in silence

The stun needle having curbed her tongue

Her fingers touching her stomach

Remembering what it was like to have the little girl in her womb

And not until it is too late does he realize that as they've been walking

His mother has been letting the filthy useless money fly from her hands

And leave a trail of dollars behind them

In the long sad night

The long sad night.

**Ed Gorman**, one of America's most highly praised crime and horror-story writers, makes his first appearance in *Interzone* with the above piece. It originally appeared as the title story of his 500-copy small-press collection *Cages* (Deadline Press, Apache Junction, Arizona, 1995) and has not been reprinted elsewhere.

# REPEAT AFTER ME AFTER ME MEREPEAT

Julian Flood

**H**e had a really good day. As he wove his way along the lanes, the banks dappled with early sunlight shining green through the fresh spring leaves, as he nosed out into the long thundering stream of traffic on the A10, he felt relaxed and ready for the great occasion. This was going to be it, make or break, the big sell or the big failure. He patted the file beside him on the passenger seat, the neat pack of discs for the presentation, the freshly printed hand-outs, the neatly typed and closely argued exposition. He was humming as he parked his car in the last slot in the staff car park and bounded up the front steps of the agency, full of hope and confidence.

He was in the boardroom before the clients with everything readied, the blinds down to keep the sunlight off the big projection screen, the presentation folders neatly placed in front of each chair. He felt cool and relaxed as the executive board filed in with the clients and took up their positions around the polished table. The chairman nodded for him to begin. He took a deep breath and launched into the most passionate and convincing sale of his life. It went like a dream.

Afterwards the chief client took him aside and stood with him by the big landscape window, looking out over the river where the spring light made the jaunty boats glitter with brilliant colours.

"How long have you been with the agency?"

"Three years. I was with EPR & T before that. I moved to be with a larger business."

"Are you happy here?"

"Up to now it's been satisfactory, but I feel I've reached some sort of ceiling. There are so few promotions from the creative side. I see myself as management, not just an ideas generator."

"Well, the skills you've shown here today are transferable, you know. They're not just needed in advertising. If you think of moving, try us first."

He nodded and swallowed, feeling the glow of satisfaction inside. Headhunted by their biggest client. What a day!

Even the afternoon wasn't a letdown. First he had a

very satisfactory meeting with the executive chairman, then he tidied away the details of the deal. Briefcase in hand he ran down the steps and into the carpark. Old Tom the attendant grunted as he lifted the barrier. He nodded.

"Night, Tom. See you tomorrow."

"Yers. If I'm 'ere. I gets these pains down me arm..."

He accelerated out into the London traffic with his radio chattering busily, sliced through the stream like a scalpel through diseased flesh, used the new ratrun by Ponder's End and was three minutes ahead of his personal record when he drove into the little village of Goff's Oak.

He was listening with half an ear to the voices on the radio.

*"Let me go over this carefully. Your theory assigns an entire world to every electron? It has its own world?"*

*"Universe, its own universe, yes. But this is not the most interesting aspect of our equations. It seems that..."*

As the last houses faded behind he changed down into third and let his feelings bubble over into rpm. Roof open, windows down, he sped through the gentle light of the setting sun, tyres just starting to squeal as he flicked, left, right, left through the chicane of burgeoning hazel catkins and celandine and hogweed.

The tanker was right on the corner, hidden from view by the fresh green of the banks, canted over into the ditch on the left side of the road. Its under-ride bars were half buried in the mud, its hazard warning lights flashing uselessly. There was just time for his foot to hit the brake before the car slammed into the back of the tank, rode up and penetrated the shell. Petrol poured in a huge amber stream out over the bonnet, through the sunroof, all around the car. He opened his mouth to scream and never even heard the sharp "woof" as the petrol ignit...

He had a good day. The weather was perfect as he pulled out onto the A10 into the thundering traffic, patting the file beside him on the seat. Everything was there, the discs, the printouts, everything he

needed to make an impression. He was whistling as he took the last space in the staff car park and ran up the steps.

In the boardroom before anyone else, he pulled down the blinds, distributed the folders and still had time to relax before everyone arrived. He gave a really excellent briefing. He could feel it going over, could see the clients nodding to themselves as he made the points. It was a sale, he was convinced of it.

Afterwards the chief client dropped a pretty broad hint that if he ever needed to move on and up then the client's firm would be a good place to start. After working on the details of the deal for the rest of the afternoon, he was feeling pretty pleased with himself when he picked up his car.

"Night, Tom. See you tomorrow."

"Yers, if I'm 'ere. I gets these pains down me arm..."

The trip home went pretty well until he dithered about taking the Ponder's End ratrun he had found the week before. He decided against it and regretted the choice after another mile. For a while he fumed in a holdup at the roundabout onto the A10. Then on the dual carriageway he had to crawl behind a pair of lorries side by side. Swearing, he clicked on the radio.

*"...interesting aspect of our equations. It seems that the electron can actually adjust the past in order to make the present fit with its needs. You have heard of the famous relativity and quantum physics incompatibilities? Well..."*

He was five minutes behind his personal record when he accelerated out of Goff's Oak, letting his excitement at the day's success spill over into speed. He was really humming when he flicked round a corner and found a tanker blocking the road. He slammed into the back so hard the front of the BMW rode up and smashed through the tank. He didn't even hear the...

The day went well. Well, that is, if he disregarded the last few minutes at work. In the morning the weather was fine. As he pulled onto the A10 he checked he had his file. After taking the last space in the staff car park he managed to get into the boardroom early so everything was ready with plenty of time to spare. The presentation went like a dream, so well that afterwards the client even gave him a hint about new opportunities away from advertising. He spent the afternoon finalizing details of the deal, then went to the carpark. The barrier remained obstinately shut. He wound down the window.

"Come on, Tom, wake up! Some of us have got to get home." No reply. He put his hand on the horn and kept it there. Still nothing. Swearing, he climbed out of the car and went to lift the barrier himself. As he did so he heard a sound from inside the attendant's hut, halfway between a snore and a groan. Tom was sprawled on the floor, his face pale, his lips blue. Spitite trailed away from his slack, whiskered mouth.

The motorcycle paramedics were very kind. They explained that he had done exactly the right things. It was not his fault, poor old Tom was as good as dead even before he fell. Massive coronary, nothing could have saved him.

He was half an hour late leaving but the choice not to take the Ponder's End ratrun proved to be a good one. The usual holdup at the roundabout onto the A10 was not there. Switching on the radio, he put his foot down hard.

*"...and quantum physics incompatibilities? Well, my equations actually explain the result by showing how the electron alters its past. Then all the difficulties of modern quantum..."*

The road was empty so he made up some time and he was only 15 minutes late as he drove through Goff's Oak, windows down to let in the soft evening air. In a mood of gentle melancholy he drifted through the lanes, thinking of old Tom. Nearly home he rounded a corner and found a tanker right in his path. He slammed on the brakes and just came to a stop in time. When he put his head out to see if the driver of the lorry was OK, he realized that the ditch was not full of water as he had thought. It was petrol, trickling slowly from a puncture high up on the left side of the tank. The lane must be full of fumes. Panic-stricken, he reached for the gear lever. Too late. He didn't even hear the "crump" as the vapour igni...

The day started well enough. The weather was good and he was feeling fine when he pulled out into the traffic, checking he had his presentation file beside him. He lost a few seconds letting a rather attractive girl cut in front of him as he turned off, and then got snarled in some roadworks. Things went wrong from the minute he got to the staff carpark a few minutes later than usual. Someone was in his space. After an altercation with the attendant he left his car parked on the street, knowing that there was a high chance he'd pick up a ticket. That made him late and, flustered, he was still putting out the folders when the clients and the senior management team came in. Halfway through the presentation the chairman irritably got up and pulled down the blinds, apologizing to the clients for the quality of the display.

It was a near thing. His boss told him confidentially over lunch that the client had dithered until offered a ten-percent cut in the overall budget.

"They're not too pleased with you upstairs, I can tell you. Don't worry, I'll watch your back. I thought you recovered fairly well after a disastrous start."

There was a ticket on his car. As he drove past the staff carpark – earlier than usual because he didn't feel up to working on the details of the deal – he saw old Tom collapse beside the barrier, falling backwards into the attendant's hut. He grabbed his car phone and dialled frantically. The paramedics told him it wasn't his fault, the old man had been ill for years. It was just his time to go. Moodily, he drove homewards, the radio muttering quietly in the background.

*"...mechanics can be explained."*

*"But wouldn't that change the world for all other electrons? I mean... ah, I see. Each electron has its own world line. So in effect there would be, for every individual electron, the best of all possible worlds."*

*"Precisely. Unless the supply of universes is limited, then we would expect competition when their needs conflicted."*

The delay meant he was 20 minutes late as he drove up the lane towards his house. As he pottered round one of the last corners, moodily thinking over the events of the day, he found a tanker blocking the road and had to slow right down to get by. Its wheels were deep in the flooded ditch. He was halfway past it when he realized the smell wafting through the open windows was spilt petrol. Frantically he slammed down the accelerator, trying to get away, but he was already too late. As the vapour ignited behind him he saw a great wall of flame reaching out to engulf...

Everything went wrong that day. As he pulled out onto the A10 he found that he had forgotten his presentation file. By the time he had gone back for it – driving five miles down the dual carriageway before he could turn round – he was very late. His parking space had been taken and he was cursing as he ran up the steps, discs and folders scattering as he sprinted through the lobby.

The clients and the upper management were already waiting when he burst through the door, blurting apologies. The presentation was a disaster, even the sun conspiring against him, shining on the projection screen so the chairman himself had to pull down the blinds.

After lunch – a lunch to which he was not invited – he was called in by his boss who spent half an hour demolishing his character, his ability and his dedication to the firm. There didn't seem much point in doing any work after that so he spent the afternoon surreptitiously clearing his desk and smuggling the personal accumulations of three years down to his car. Pre-emptive perhaps, but he knew the business well enough to realize that within a week he would be out. The BMW had a parking ticket on its windscreens.

He left half an hour early, waving to old Tom who was leaning on the barrier, wheezing. Even after the usual hold-up at the roundabout he was ten minutes early when he drove through Goff's Oak, cut in front of a petrol tanker which was belching smoke as it pulled out from the garage forecourt, and got home before seven o'clock for the first time ever. His wife was in the study, working over her usual stack of books.

"How did it go?" she called.

"Total disaster. Everything went wrong that could go wrong. Do you want a gin?"

"Please." Her face was full of concern when she came to join him as he stood by the window, staring out over the valley. "Was it really bad?"

"Terminal. Fatal in fact." He laughed shortly. "God, if only I could have another chance at it. Too late now to think of how I could have done better. Maybe I should have stayed in town overnight." He drank moodily. "Maybe I'm not cut out for the biz. Maybe I should admit defeat and join you."

She put her arm through his but he shook her off and started to pace around the room. She watched him over the rim of her glass.

"Teaching's not defeat. I always said you'd be better off getting away from London. You're wasting your talents. You had a vocation when I met you, that's

why we fell in love."

"We'd have to sell up here."

"Not necessarily, not if we both work. Anyway, we could get somewhere a bit cheaper, move further out."

The radio was chattering in the corner.

"...seems a shame we can't do the same. We could alter the past to make sure we always get a good day. And no matter what happened to other people we, individually, would end up as successful."

"Our maths doesn't really translate up to macroscopic scales. We're dealing with the atom here. The important thing is that this theory removes many of the quantum world paradoxes. Besides, if we relived each day, how would we know what would count as successful, long term? If..."

"Er, yes, perhaps on a general interest programme we shouldn't go quite so deeply into..."

He turned the radio off, resumed his growling.

"I wish I could do that. Relive today I mean. I'd make it better, I can tell you," he said.

She stared at the setting sun, tinkling the ice in her glass.

"Don't be so gloomy. After all, things could be worse. We'll look back at today as the beginning of a whole new life, you just wait. Things will be much better from now on."

He grinned savagely.

"Yeah, well. Voltairean philosophy isn't what I need right now. Tell you what, Pollyanna, get me another very large gin and I'll try to agree."

"Not if you're going to start in on that self-pity again. I've told you before..."

He grinned reluctantly. "Maybe you're right. Perhaps this is the best of all possible worlds, the best of a lot of poorish options."

"Not poor!" she flared. "How could you think that? Not with us together..."

The doorbell rang and she hurried to answer: he was very late tonight and she always worried. It was a policeman. Hovering anxiously in the background was the vicar and behind him, down in the darkening valley, she could see a stuttering syncopation of blue emergency lights. Her heart leapt in her chest and seemed to stop completely, leaving her feeling isolated and totally alone in a hostile world. She knew what they had come to say. The constable swallowed, obviously at a loss about how to begin. Eventually he found his voice.

"I'm awfully sorry, it's your husband. He's had a dreadful accident."

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She could cope with this. Who knows, she thought, it might be the beginning of something, not the end.

**Julian Flood** has contributed four previous stories to *Interzone*: "The Jade Pool" (issue 57), "Children of a Greater God" (issue 62), "An Occupational Disease" (issue 74) and "Meditations of the Heart" (issue 87). He lives in Suffolk.

genres you already know you like.

I suspect the way forward would be to try and trash the marketing system which pigeonholes books into particular genres. So get rid of the marketing departments. Then you issue all books in plain wrappers without the authors' names on them so every writer gets a fair crack at the readers without prejudice. I know it's revolutionary and publishers are not always receptive to change, but I can't wait for the first catalogue to arrive that simply lists each book "untitled by anonymous" with no blurb, no quotes, and no ISBNs. Hell, while we're about it, let's cut out the middlemen like Dillons, Waterstones and Smiths by pricing them at 99p and going straight into the remainder shops which, according to Francis O'Reagan, is a surefire way to shift copies. Start making your placards now and we'll march on W.C.2 next week!

Steve "Che" Holland

Colchester, Essex

Dear Editors:

As Papa H would have said on such a day as this, it is the time of year when the men and the women get out the books of cheques and the cards (that are not cards but plastic) and do the thing with the money and the post box. So listen, Gringo, that's 30 of the little brass ones you got from me. Be sure you spend it well. There should be twelve of them coming to me now, these things with the stories, what you call them, magazines.

But to be serious for a moment. Like Dave Stone and Francis O'Reagan ("Interaction," *IZ* 107) I have been bending my thoughts towards an answer to the sf scene's current woes. I would like to make my own contribution to the debate, but first I must add an important caveat. As Umberto Eco — in the guise of one of his minor characters — points out in *Foucault's Pendulum*, "Every complex problem has a simple solution, and it's wrong."

Let me begin by saying that, although *Interzone* is not usually as been stacked in piles as deep as those of *Radio Times* or *Hello* in every newsagent's shop in the land, it is in a healthier state than most short-fiction magazines, sf or not. I have seen them come and go, mostly go, over the last couple of decades. Some only last two or three issues. None have chalked up a hundred. Perhaps the secret lies in not making unachievable promises and narrow policy statements accompanied by loud flourishes of trumpets. *Interzone's* continuing presence is due to massive efforts by all involved, as well as the support of a loyal readership. That Hugo Award last year was richly deserved.

The received wisdom (or perhaps received stupidity) in publishing at the moment is that sf is in decline.

Various reasons have been suggested. The idea mooted in a recent *IZ* editorial pointing out the parallel case of the western is ingenious, but perhaps misleading. I don't believe any popular form has a natural life-span, whose limits are fixed by mass extinctions and ice ages. Westerns gradually bit the dust, so to speak, when close scrutiny showed the genre to be based on unsupportable premises, both of historical accuracy and political correctness. It is worth noting that the gradual realization of this problem seems to have enabled the western, in the cinema at least, to renew itself. After a period of reflection, greater attention to detail has revealed not a heroic golden age but a wholly other way of life — barbaric, chaotic, an image of civilized man and his laws in uncivilized situations. The mythical wild west may have gone forever, but there are still interesting stories to be told.

Science fiction's problems are of a different nature. The most obvious difficulty, and one which has been pointed out many times, is that sf had the misfortune to collide with its own invented future. There are no Martian colonies. We don't all travel in family helicopters. Moving pavements, as demonstrated in certain airports, turn out to be slower than walking. We have computers in many suburban homes, but they don't keep the children amused, order the groceries or wash the dishes. At least, not all at once they don't.

Unfortunately, many readers had been turned on to sf precisely because it was the cheerleader for new technology (to quote Brian Aldiss). Then came the atomic bomb and science lost its innocence. Sf became critical of those things it had once embraced and the original readership fell away. Sociological sf and the experiments of the new wave just weren't as sexy as hi-tech derring-do. This is the usual reason trotted out whenever the scene seems to be in crisis. I would like to propose a different, perhaps more cynical, view of the problem, and maybe a solution.

A distinguished independent publisher was once heard to remark that it is a good idea for a publisher to employ an accountant, but not the other way round. The noble art of accountancy should enjoy a similar relationship with corporate affairs as does the military with a democracy. Soldiers can be extremely useful people to have around, under certain circumstances, but you must never let them get their hands on the levers of government. Experience shows that this always ends in tears. Accountants perform uniquely useful functions in keeping companies such as publishers solvent, but once they take their places on the board of directors the focus shifts, to the point where the

product is not books but money. This is an unhealthy situation.

Similar strictures ought to apply to the inexact science of marketing. Once the author has written the book and the editors have knocked it into shape, the marketing department is given the task of working out how to sell it. Over the years, marketing people are bound to pick up masses of useful information about the kind of things people like to read, which are the target audiences for which genre, and so on. However, if this information is employed, not to assist the marketing effort but in the initial choice of books to be published, you enter a downward spiral excluding all but the fastest-selling lines, to the point of market saturation and exhaustion, which will gradually erode the entire book market. (In other words, enough already with the trilogies!) Brian Stableford's essay on the career of John Brunner (also in *IZ* 107) is a typical case history of this problem.

You would think people might learn from past mistakes, but this entails awareness that mistakes are being made. In the 1960s a record company launched a pop group which had been assembled on the basis of a market-research exercise. Their photograph and a very brief history of their very brief career appeared in one of the music papers. This was their only public appearance. They were never heard of again. In the previous decade a leading motor manufacturer brought out a new model whose every feature was based on market research. The last few examples had to be raffled.

I understand similar observations have been made in the field of economics, a subject I confess I can comprehend only fleetingly, and always from the victim's point of view. If theoretical economic models are used by politicians to derive economic policy — so the new theory goes — the model collapses, and with it large parts of a nation's economy. I have a feeling this phenomenon, whether in accountancy, marketing or economics, is a kind of feedback effect. Putting data back into the wrong part of the system, instead of applying it directly to the case in hand, will inevitably diminish the operation, like a worm devouring its own tail.

I believe publishers should take their accountants and marketing people to one side, and leave them there. It ought to be left to authors, editors and all the other creative people, to decide which books are worth reading, and to proceed on that basis. The marketing department and the accountants should take their brief from the publishers and store their accumulated wisdom for their own use. If this doesn't happen, it will be downhill all the way to formulaic fiction-by-numbers and more-of-the-same with a vengeance.

Stuart Falconer  
Ponteland, Northumberland

+ + + The + + +

+ + + Gulf + + +

+ + + War + + +

*Ian McDonald*

My dear friends, I can prevaricate no longer. What we have been told is the truth about the Arab war is daily revealed to be calumny and dissembling. Cunningly crafted half-truth camouflages clever half-lie. Why, I have heard that a certain witty French philosopher has declared that the Gulf War never happened, so tainted is the evidence of it, so open to manipulation are the channels of communication through which we observed it. Let me tell you, it did happen. You may trust me about this. I was present throughout it, from its inception to its inconclusive conclusion. As you will discover, gentle reader, I played an active, nay, crucial role in every part of its conduct. I have until now held my peace on the subject, but my honour will not permit me to allow these lies to continue. You shall hear the true story of the Gulf War. After all, the man who started it is surely uniquely qualified to relate how he ended it.

Permit me to introduce myself. I am the Baron Munchausen; traveller, scholar, philosopher, adventurer, lover, righter of wrongs, swordsman, wit, raconteur, epicurean; *Summa Cum Laude* of the Hidden Collegium of Prague, *Magister Exemplis* of the Great University of Fez; Companion of the Bed Chamber to Catherine the Great of Russia, confidant of Crowned Heads of Europe, Sultans, Pontiffs and Presidents. I have dined with deities, diced demons, travelled to the deepest recesses of the sea and to the courts of the king of the moon. I have battled fearsome beasts, baffled sages and wizards, confounded princes and tumbled despots. I have seduced starlets, bedded empresses, made fortunes and lost them on the flip of a card, single-handed fought entire armies to a standstill, scaled unscalable mountains, sailed unsailable seas, found lost continents, cheated death a thousand times and

spat as many times in the eye of fortune. You may have read of some of my earlier exploits; if of late you have not heard much of me, perhaps you thought it was because in my old age I have given up adventuring, retired from derring-do, or – heavens – died. Phaugh! Decrepitude and death were amongst the earliest foes I trounced, and they have learned to respect the Baron, though they try by devious means to vex me. If I have seemed silent over-long, it is because of this rational and cynical age, which has no patience with tales of adventure and imagination. But now I find governments telling tales of wonder and imagination to rival my own exploits, which the populace lap up, and it seems to me that the golden age of story telling has again come round, so perhaps the greatest story-teller of all is due a renaissance.

As I have said, I felt compelled to end the Gulf War because I started it. I am amused by this scientific theory of chaos which tells us that momentous events may grow from tiny seeds: a hurricane from a butterfly's wings, so it is said. For want of a horse-shoe nail, the kingdom is lost. So it is with this war. The tale of it is soon told. Listen now.

Early in the age of enlightenment I earned the undying friendship of the House of Sabah, of the Anizah tribe of the Bedouin people. With my trusty friends Berthold, Albrecht, Gustavus and Adolphus, I had relieved the Sultan of Baghdad of all the treasure in his storehouse, in satisfaction of our wager over the bottle of Tokay. Having no wish to run into the armies he had sent out to apprehend us – the man was an insufferably ungracious loser – we had steered away from the levantine ports, which his pandours were systematically razing, taking a course through the

great desert of Araby, to take ship at one of the many ports of the Gulf of Persia and so return to civilization. Albrecht is the strongest and most enduring of servants, but the desert heat and the great mass of treasure taxed even his redoubtable stamina. We were forced to make many halts while Albrecht regained his strength, which minute by minute cost us our head-start on the Sultan's forces. We were still deep in the sands of the great Arabian desert when Gustavus, who from the Lido of Venice can hear the drop of a mandarin's comb in a palace in Cathay, reported the hoof-beats of the Sultan's cavalry half a day behind us, and fast closing. We could not hope to escape with the treasure, and, though I am singularly free from the love of lucre that is the enduring social poison of all ages, I was loathe to leave it lying in the middle of the desert, to be heaped over by the blowing sands and lost forever. How fortunate then, that at the very limit of Albrecht's vigour, we should encounter the wandering Sabahs, who, in return for a few dates, a jar or so of refreshing water and respite in their shady bivouacs from the heat, were only too willing to relieve us of the burden of gold, which they split between them before making off into the great erg.

When I could safely return to the part of the world, I expressly visited the sheikh who had helped me in my straits, and was delighted to find he had established a vigorous little mercantile emirate on the back of the Sultan of Baghdad's treasure! The emir welcomed me with matchless Arab hospitality and we swore a pact of undying friendship between our houses. Unfortunately, it seemed that the secret of my little ploy in the desert had reached Baghdad and that the Sultan had declared undying enmity until his treasure was returned to him. What else could an aristocrat do? It was morally incumbent upon me that I become the country's protector. However, knowing my proclivities for foreign travel and high adventure, I was forced to admit that I was not the most reliable of defenders, so I advised the emir to ally himself with the British, whom I reckon to be no worse a gaggle of profiteers than any other colonialists, and possess bigger guns than most. They are, however, incorrigible snobs, and could only trust in dealings with a European face; wherefore I was appointed ambassador plenipotentiary (and peripatetic) of the emirate of Kuwait to the Court of St James's.

It was in this capacity that I fear I further salted the tail of the Baghdaids when it came to the border dispute of 1922. I had by then been, in various guises and aliases to disguise my uncommon longevity, the counsellor of six generations of royal Sabahs, but the memories of the Sultans of Baghdad are long, and their spies ubiquitous. They may not have guessed the secret of my little victory over mortality, but they recognized a continuity, and perpetuated their ancestral grudge against what they imagined as my line: all the more so now that I was directly engaged in negotiations with them over their territorial claim to the lands of the Sabahs. It has, I regret to note, always been a trait of the rulers of that great Mesopotamian nation that they do not bear slight graciously.

The Congress of Al 'Uqbar had been called to end this enduring territorial dispute. In my capacity as Ambassador Extraordinary, I had, with the representatives of the British Protectorate, negotiated a fair and just settlement. The crowning act of the Congress was the symbolic drawing by myself and the Baghdad Foreign Secretary of the new border on a large scale map of the Gulf spread on the negotiating table in the conference hall. Both our hands were to move the pen, clasped in a gesture of concord. Claim and counter-claim have been made, and historians come to blows, over who first tried to pull the pen from its allotted line. You may accept the word of a gentleman and aristocrat that it was not I. Sensing that my counterpart was pulling for Baghdad – it was somewhere around Wastes of Al Haq, I recall – I merely sought to correct the imbalance. I cannot be held accountable if my opposite number imagined I was gaining territory for Kuwait, and pulled all the harder for his own side. Of course, the consequence was that very soon we came to a standstill, face to face, somewhere in the middle of the great erg, both of us pulling for all our might on the mapping pen. Sensing that my superior strength was beginning to tell for Kuwait, my counterpart called for help, whereupon an aide seized him around the waist and began to pull for all his might. Immediately a British attaché leaped to my assistance, and thus began an unseemly tug of war as diplomats rushed to pull for their man and the honour of their country. Very soon both entourages had formed into skirmishes around us, heaving for all their might, and junior secretaries were sent running through the building bribing staff to leave their posts and haul for the respective teams. I am told several unpleasant fights broke out between the retainers of each party, and certain domestics ended up with small fortunes or landed estates as the bidding for their muscle power rose. Alas, it was the perfidious under-pastry-chef who decided it. In his spare time he was a Turkish wrestler of some repute, who had served in the palace of the Sabahs in Kuwait until an indiscretion with a goat and a pair of harem pants led to his current employment at Al 'Uqbar. We could not match his combination of physical strength and private resentment. Command of the pen swung to Iraq; great territory was lost by the House of Sabah.

I could not permit this disgrace to go unrighted, and for the middle decades of this most turbulent of centuries I was engaged in territorial negotiations with successive Baghdad regimes. None of them bore fruit; indeed, as my adopted homeland's wealth burgeoned with the discovery of oil, the demands were extended and became more strident. I will admit to some small success in the early 1960s, after Kuwait became independent, when the protestations of Baghdad settled to a simmer, but I had seen too much of the wiles and ways of humans to trust the state of affairs would endure. My suspicions were confirmed when the Saddam family rose to power in Iraq. I have made it a maxim of my life never to trust a family where all the men wear moustaches. Heed it: it is a good maxim. The Saddams, and Hussein of that family in particular, were true heirs of the late lamented Sultan whose treasure I appropri-

ated in that they begrudge in epic manner those who displease them. Foremost among those is the Baron Munchausen.

This is how I won the enmity of the House of Saddam. Listen now. Of all their sex, the beautiful ladies of Arabia hold an especial attraction to me. I could long extol their many virtues, praise their multitudinous charms. I am helpless before them! Faced then, on one of my diplomatic missions to Baghdad, with the most beautiful, the most radiant woman, the epitome of Mesopotamian beauty, as regal, as noble as any Queen of Nineveh, how could I resist? What did it matter that she was Yasmeen, eldest daughter of President Hussein himself, the very fig of his tree? To me, she was the incarnation of Ishtar! Of course I plied her my suit, and, of course (for, if I may be permitted a small boast, to the man who has conquered Catherine the Great, Tsarina of all the Russias, all others are easy quarry) she did not deny me. She was exceeding sweet (though lacking the icy Russian fire of the Tsarina), and most willing, and through the Presidential satellite dish, had access to all the European sex channels. One fact I must assert: I did not abduct her as the Saddams have claimed; she willingly came with me to my small but exquisite palace in Kuwait. As the President's beloved daughter – fig of his tree, and all that – a degree of disguise was necessary. That she travelled in a luggage trunk, (comfortably upholstered, I hasten to add, and with its own air and water supply) was entirely her own suggestion. And if, once she was established at the Munchausen palace, she refused all family entreaties to return home; that too was her own choice. Which is to say that I can see no grounds for the vendetta sworn against me by the house of Saddam. The Baghdad regime was effectively waging two wars at once: one against Iran, the other against the Baron Munchausen. The assassination attempt in 1985 on my excellent friend, Sheikh Jaber Al Sabah, was a case of mistaken identity. Once Saddam's dealings with the Iranians were concluded, he was able to devote his full attention to redressing his nation's long history of grievances against me.

I was consulting with the leaders of the Balkan nations when the tanks rolled into Kuwait in search of the seducer Munchausen. Invading armies are the worst of bad tenants; once they are in, they are nigh impossible to get out. I could not repel the occupiers single-handed, so I enlisted the help of my allies of old.

Berthold I found managing a health and golf club in the Portuguese Algarve, to which he had retired after the unfortunate steroids scandal surrounding the athletes under his tutelage. I exonerate him totally; it can only have been his proteges' envy at the man who once outran the wind itself. For old affection and loyalty, he agreed to postpone working down his eight handicap and aid the people of Kuwait.

Albrecht, as simple-minded as he is great-hearted, I discovered employed as a personal bodyguard by a Colombian cocaine baron, who displayed a regrettable failure of etiquette in response to my requests to release Albrecht to me. I cannot abide bad manners. The subsequent United States DEA citation, signed

by President Bush himself, thanked me profusely for my assistance in liquidating the particularly troublesome Cartagena cartel.

I tracked Adolphus, who could shoot out whichever eye of a fly you specified from five miles, down to a fundamentalist survivalist community in North Dakota, where he drilled the members in small and long arms techniques and marksmanship, with additional courses in elementary terrorism, including the manufacture of van bombs and various nerve gases. He was not displeased to leave that cold and windy plain. He disliked greatly the daily singing dawn hymns to the weaponry.

Gustavus, whose hearing I have praised before in this narrative, and whose prodigious lungs could inflate a zeppelin in under a minute, was contracted to the Russian military who, faced with budget cutbacks, spiralling costs, and a widening technology gap with the West, employed him as a combined listening post and early-warning device. His voice had been tested in the forests of Siberia to have a range of several hundred miles, and the felled trees had provided a valuable source of foreign revenue.

Thus equipped with my worthy retainers, I returned to Arabia to expel the invader from my homeland, only to find myself pre-empted. A coalition of united Arabic, French, British, Italian and American forces had assembled in Saudi Arabia under the generalship of a fat, bull-necked, shaven-headed man by the name of "Schwarzkopf." One military man to another, I explained how I was responsible for starting this war and offered him the services of my retainers and my several centuries of battle wisdom.

"Together, we must strike them like a desert storm," I told him. The epigram must have pleased him, as he adopted it not just as the codename for the military operation, but as his own personal alias. I suppose "Stormin' Norman" has more of a ring to it than "Stormin' Munchausen."

Together with a third military gent, a charming black American whose only fault was a seeming inability to pronounce his first name correctly, we discussed strategy. General Schwarzkopf favoured bombing the enemy back to the Stone Age. Mindful of the many beauties of Baghdad, and its generous, if ill-led people, I proposed that the propaganda war would be better served if specifically military, non-civilian targets were hit. A kind of precision bombing, was my expression. When they told me such a thing was a contradiction in terms, I suggested that it was surely not beyond the capabilities of the world's greatest superpower to create the *illusion* of precision bombing.

So it was that early in the morning of January 17, the air war was opened against the House of Saddam in a combined assault of strike aircraft and ship-launched cruise missiles. I hear that the night skies of Baghdad were lit up like pyrotechnics with ground bursts, tracer fire, aircraft exhausts, missile trails and wild weasel flares: a most splendid sight, by the accounts of the satellite news correspondents who had not yet been expelled. All I saw of it were General Schwarzkopf's press conferences. The video footage looked most convincing.

On that night that the rockets flew, Gustavus and I

went north on a most secret and vital mission: to pin down the Iraqi Republican Guard in their positions. This elite cadre posed a serious threat to the success of Desert Storm. The generals favoured the saturation bombing of their positions with fuel-air explosives, but I convinced them that I had a more cost-effective, and subtle plan. I have in the past found elite troops to have a fatal weakness in the area of personal honour.

Passing by night through poor imprisoned Kuwait and crossing the border, which, according to Baghdad, no longer existed since the annexation of the 19th province of the republic of Iraq, we came early in the first day of the Gulf War to the positions of the Republican Guard.

Their revetments and redoubts were impressive; mile upon mile of sand fortifications, trenches filled with oil which could be ignited at moment's notice; great sweeping minefields and tank traps and artillery emplacements. I fear they would have given pause even to General Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf.

By the dawn's early light, Gustavus and I climbed the mightiest of the man-made dunes. Below us lay the enemy encampment. Those yet sleeping woke in a trice at Gustavus's thunderous shout. His Excellency the Baron Munchausen, Ambassador Plenipotentiary of the House of Sabah, hereby challenged the Guard of President Saddam of Iraq. I do not know where Gustavus learned his capacious and expressive vocabulary of insults – perhaps, in the depths of the Russian winter, in deepest darkest Siberia, there was little else to do apart from play poetic insult games – but he questioned their births, their sisters' professions, their mother's sexual preferences, their fathers' genital dimensions, their friends' affections, their rectal pleasure in cucumbers and other kitchen vegetables, their relationships with farmyard animals, their putative masculinity, their secret delight in women's clothing, their physical prowess, their muscular inferiority to schoolgirls.

Suffice to say that my terms were swiftly agreed to. On the top of the dune I drew a line in the sand where every day their champion and mine would meet. While they fought, the Republican Guard would be permitted to advance. Once the fighting was over, the advance would cease. Gustavus was my champion, and the hope of all Kuwait. The Iraqis chose a member of their elite paratroop forces, skilled in all the fastest and most deadly martial arts. He advanced up the dune flank practising his moves and ploys, with much swishing of hands and kicking of feet. It was all over before the Republican Guard had bagged up their bed rolls. Martial arts are a very fine thing, but the art of halitosis is finer. Throughout our march, and for several days previously, the faithful Gustavus had existed on a diet of members of the alium family, seasoned with limburger cheese, cabbage and anchovies, all washed down with moonshine whisky that I had diplomatic bagged into the kingdom of Saud. The poor fellow never knew what hit him. I had carefully positioned myself downwind, but the faintest whiff that escaped was sufficient to turn my stomach. As far as I know, the poor chap has been treated in Baghdad as a chemical warfare victim, and now partakes of the

blandest of diets.

Thus the pattern was established, and the Republican Guard neutralized. Every day I would call out their strongest and doughtiest from their dune fortresses to cross my line in the sand and fell them instantly with the mighty draught from Gustavus's mouth and lungs. I was quite relieved when word came recalling me to Dahrarn on a most urgent matter, for one tires quickly of warfare by halitosis. I could trust Gustavus to hold the line, so I arranged airdrops of onions and cheese to resupply him and returned post haste to allied command where I learned, to my vast dismay, that the lovely Yasmeen, fig of the tree of Saddam, had been winkled out of her hiding place in Kuwait City and brought, bound hand and foot, to Baghdad to face the displeasure of her father.

Such insolence could not be countenanced. The Generals tried to persuade me that a rescue mission – my immediate thought – would be tantamount to suicide. All Iraq by now would know that their old enemy was the confounder of the Republican Guard; I would be recognized the instant I set foot on the streets of Baghdad.

"But my dear gentlemen," I told them. "The whole plan is not ever to set foot on the streets of Baghdad!"

Thus it was that I found myself on a pleasant January night aboard the USS *Saratoga*, in the balmy waters of the Persian Gulf, cruising off Basra. To be exact, I was standing above the muzzle of a cruise missile launching tube. From my experience with other projectiles I have ridden, such as cannon balls, I knew that the most difficult part is the correct mount. Timing must be exact, especially with cruise missiles, where incineration by jet exhaust awaits the unwary rider. Therefore, with every nerve strained, every muscle tensed, I felt the tell-tale vibration that signalled engine light-up, and as the tip of the weapon slid out of its tube, I leaped, caught hold of the reins fastened to the control surfaces, and rode the missile like the wildest of wild buckaroos into the Iraqi night.

I can say without fear of contradiction it was the most exhilarating ride since Catherine the Great, skimming the ground at several hundred miles per hour, hopping over trees and buildings and hills as we hurtled along the line of the Shatt Al Arab waterway into the heart of enemy territory. For the most part I trusted the device's guidance system, I would not need to accept manual control until we arrived in the vicinity of Baghdad. On through the night we flew, dodging a surface-to-air missile here, a fighter interceptor there. I suspect the pilots will never file their reports of sighting a grey-haired man of aristocratic bearing flying through the air on the back of a cruise missile. I slipped under Baghdad's radar screen, took up the reins and guided my steed – which I had named Bucephalus, after my much-loved, sadly-lost mount – through the wide avenues and boulevards towards the Presidential Palace. Those few souls who were abroad looked up in amazement to see me hurtling by a few feet above their heads. So stunned were they that none thought to lift their weapons and

loose off a shot or two.

Looking down, I lamented the damage the bombs had done to that fine city, and marvelled at the cleverness of the Allied military intelligence in convincing the world that surgical strikes had minimized collateral damage. Before me rose the Presidential Palace. As I heaved on the reins to slow Bucephalus, elegant loops of orange tracer fire arced toward me. Saddam's guards were more quick-witted than the street people of Baghdad. Bucephalus responded as magnificently as its horse-flesh namesake. I easily dodged the fire as I circled the palace, checking it against my sketch-map for the Presidential office wherein, so my intelligence informed me, the beautiful Yasmeen was held by her father. The fifth floor, screened by intricate fretwork windows, was the place. I gave Bucephalus her head and, taking the exquisite window screen and a large section of wall with me, crashed into the office. I came to a halt before the throne. Before finger could be raised to stop me, I had snatched up the beautiful Yasmeen from under the eyes of her father and uncles and brothers. With a jaunty, devil-may-care wave, I placed her in the seat behind me, admonished her to hold tight, throttled up the engines and crashed out through the opposite, equally exquisite latticed window into the night and freedom.

Given the speed of events, the darkness of the night, the completeness of the surprise, the shot was magnificent. I suspect it came from the hand of Hussein himself. It passed within an inch of my nose and buried itself in Bucephalus's starboard wing. Unfortunately, it struck our fuel reserve: spraying aviation fuel, we careered across Baghdad's night sky, and it quickly became evident that we no longer had sufficient to return to friendly territory. Indeed, it was doubtful we would escape the environs of the city. Asking Yasmeen to trust me – which she did, implicitly – I turned Bucephalus's nose toward the main Iraqi Air Force base in the suburbs. We made it over the wire with our final drop and came to a none-too-gentle halt in the middle of the runway. In the dark, in the midst of confusion, it was not difficult for a master of many tongues like myself to masquerade as an Iraqi Air Force officer. I commandeered the first two-seater out on the field. To one who has flown to the moon towed by seagulls, a MIG is child's-play. My night-flight toward Allied territory started something of a fad amongst Iraqi pilots. Over the next few days, three quarters of the Air Force decided to follow my example and fly off to friendlier climes.

No sooner had I deposited the beautiful Yasmeen under the protection of the House of Saud, with whom my relations are almost as cordial as with the House of Sabah, I was confronted with a fresh problem requiring my unique talents. The Republican Guard were effectively stymied by the noisome Gustavus, but a new fear had struck the Allies. I refer to the Scud missile, launched from God knows where, falling from the heavens God knows when, with God knows what warhead. The devious device had brought a reign of terror to the cities and bases of Saudi Arabia. How can we stop these missiles raining down on us?

the generals asked me. The solution required but little thought. To a man who can spy the eye of a gnat at five miles and shoot it out with single bullet, bringing down a 20-ton rocket falling to earth at a thousand miles per hour is as simple as tin ducks in a carnival gallery. Armed with only his custom-built long-bore rifle and his eagle-sharp vision, Adolphus shot down every missile targeted on Dahran. You may have seen his handiwork on television: the falling bright dot of the descending Scud, the streak of light rising to meet it, the satisfying pyrotechnics. How regrettable that his achievement can never be recognized; that the generals, for the sake of good propaganda, promulgated the story of some invincible American countermissile, with a suitably patriotic name.

But my ploy was not merely defensive. A man who can outrun a cannonball is an invaluable asset in finding mobile missile sites in the great Arabian desert. At his best speed, Berthold could spot, track, and report the position of a Scud launcher before its crew had even erected their diabolical device. In under a week, Allied air power, combined with Berthold's speed and Adolphus's marksmanship had eliminated the Scud menace.

With the air defence of the Allied war effort left in Berthold and Adolphus's capable hands, I was able to turn my attention to an even more distressing turn of events. Playing to the western weakness for things environmental and feathered or furred, my enemy to the north had opened the valves of his great oil refineries and poured vile crude onto the placid waters of the Gulf across which it had spread into a vast, choking slick. I am by no means a sentimental man, but the plight of those poor Soccotran cormorants struggling to shore, mired and tarred with oil, moved me to action. The generals had no strategies for a war on the environment, and though they were incredulous at my plan, they lent me the small rowing boat that was all I required to save the Persian Gulf.

It is several centuries since my hasty departure from the Isle of Cheese involved me all too intimately with Island Fish Jasconius. I escaped from his belly through the judicious application of snuff to the tonsils, and, like so many others in this tale, he has held a grudge against me ever since. When last I saw him, in the late 1890s, he was masquerading as a coral reef off the Red Sea coast of Yemen, with some accomplishment; Club Med had established a beach resort on his southern slopes. Fortunately, the public fear of air travel at the time of the Gulf War meant that this was deserted when Albrecht and I came rowing around the southern cape of Aden in our US Navy dinghy. From the bow, I declared my presence and insulted him for an hour in Gustavus's best style. Two and a half centuries of somnolence had diminished neither Jasconius's temper nor appetite. Shaking off the wooden chalets, beach bars and nightclubs with a shrug of his back, he leaped in pursuit of us. Albrecht needed to row with all his might and main – which is considerably more than even the most powerful outboard engine – to spare us a second incarceration in the beast's intestinal tract. He chased us right around

Yemen, and the capes of Oman, and into the Persian Gulf, where I ordered Albrecht to row a little slower, so that Jasconius would think that he was gaining on us and open his mouth for the terminal swallow. We led the foolish, furious beast a merry low-speed chase through the oiled waters of the Gulf, and I report to my complete satisfaction that every last drop of oil – not to mention several mines, gunboats, submarines and very much shrimp – disappeared into that cavernous maw. And that we did not. Stricken by a sudden bout of indigestion, Island Fish Jasconius settled to the sea-floor of the Gulf, weighed down by several million barrels of Gulf crude. There he remains to this day, a sizable island in the Straits of Hormuz. Quite appropriately, he has been designated a sanctuary for the endangered Soccotran cormorant, and the Omanis have built a lighthouse on him to warn off shipping. I am not so sure of the wisdom of their recent decision leasing oil exploration rights on him to Royal Dutch/Shell.

So it was that I saved the Soccotran cormorant from extinction, and the livelihoods of the Gulf shrimpers, but the attention of the world were turned elsewhere, to the long-awaited ground offensive against the Iraqis. In the space of a few days, the generals pushed the House of Saddam out of the House of Sabah, annexed the 19th province of the Republic of Iraq, and annihilated one hundred thousand conscript soldiers with a combined assault of cluster bombs and fuel-air explosives as they were attempting to withdraw along the Basra road.

Seeing that the generals were managing to subdue the foe without my assistance, I turned to the atrocities the erstwhile occupiers had wreaked on the land I had sworn to protect. In a final fit of pique, the invaders, on orders from the Presidential Palace, had set alight the great majority of Kuwait's oil wells. Various experts in oil well blazes conferred and declared that it would take the remainder of this century to extinguish all the gushers. This would not do. The Baron Munchausen could not stand by and let the country's economic well-being blaze away to nothing, never mind the damage inflicted by the smoke on young lungs. In my own inimitable fashion, I took matters into my own hands.

The Desert Storm offensive had released Gustavus from his duty manning the line in the sand against the Republican Guard, whom he had left sadly diminished even before their ultimate annihilation from the air. I gave him a few days on boiled rice, bran and distilled water to purge his system, then took him out to the burning wells. As I have said many times – and it is a wise maxim – I have always found a pinch of snuff to be most efficacious.

Truth be told, there was now little for me to do regarding the liberation of Kuwait. General Schwarzkopf was pursuing the tatters of the Republican Guard as fast as they could run towards Baghdad, commensurate with UN Resolution 661 forbidding the actual military overthrow of the Saddam regime. I was satisfied with my own personal tweaking of Great Satan's moustaches, though, alas, the beautiful Yas-

meen was as fickle as she was comely, and when I returned to Riyadh after the victory celebrations in Kuwait city – in which I was feted, chaired through the streets while parents held up their children for me to bless with my touch and young women threw themselves before me, decorated with the highest honours of the House of Sabah and awarded the freedom of city and state – I found that she had absconded in company of a former member of the pop group INXS. All I have left is the statue they erected in Kuwait City to that stirring incident, of myself astride the cruise missile, fearlessly defying the skies of Iraq. It was removed a short time later, for the official victory celebrations, at the behest of General Schwarzkopf, who did not think it would bode well for the world to see that the American New World Order rested on one old aristocrat and a handful of retainers. It was replaced by a statue, in exactly the same spot, of General Schwarzkopf, bullish as ever, astride a tank.

Ingratitude was the only thanks I received from the Allies, for whom I had won the war. Alas, I was an embarrassment to them. The world could not know that victory in the Gulf was not due to precision bombing or surgical military strikes or superior battle technology or the wonders of the Patriot missile, but to me, Munchausen. This is not the age of heroes any more, they told me. You are an anachronism, there is no place for your deeds and stories in this new world order. And they edited the stories and changed the pictures to make it so. Dear reader, if you find this account frankly incredible, and unsupported by the evidence; ask yourself, what is this evidence? Pictures on your television screen, words in your newspapers, whispers on your radios. If I tell you that I began and ended the Gulf War, and you do not believe me because of the evidence of your eyes and ears, it is only because they manipulated the stories so completely.

Perhaps you are thinking that mine is only another story, no more true, no more false than any other of the fairy tales through which we console ourselves that we know what is really happening in the wide world. That is your choice; there have always been those who, at best, disbelieved the Baron, at worst called him an outrageous liar and spinner of tall tales. But I think that perhaps the generals were wrong. I am not an anachronism. The age of heroes has, alas ended, but the age of the spinners of tales taller, and more pernicious, than any I ever yarned, is just beginning.

Indeed, these musings have put me in mind of another of my latter-day adventures, which, if I have the time, and the opportunity, I think you would enjoy hearing of my involvement with the Royal House of Windsor, and the misunderstanding I inadvertently caused between Charles of that house and his wife, the beautiful Diana...

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**Ian McDonald** is one of Britain's most lauded sf and fantasy authors, with a noted gift for *Speaking in Tongues* (the title of one of his collections). His last contributions here were "Frooks" (issue 100) and "Recording Angel" (issue 104). Ian continues to live in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

As I write, two lots of Hugo nominations have just arrived... since this year's World SF Convention in Los Angeles is presenting not only the expected Hugos for 1995 work, but "retro-Hugos" for 1945. Rather than devote the whole page to this, let's confine ourselves to the two most popular categories... The 1995 Novel shortlist goes: *The Time Ships* by Stephen Baxter, *Brightness Reef* by David Brin, *The Terminal Experiment* by Robert J. Sawyer, *The Diamond Age* by Neal Stephenson, and *Remake* by Connie Willis. Good for our Stephen! Dramatic Presentation: *Apollo 13*, "The Coming of Shadows" (*Babylon 5*), "The Visitor" (*Star Trek: DS9*), *Toy Story, 12 Monkeys*. The hotly controversial one is *Apollo 13*: is it sf? And is it more science-fictional than Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, which was firmly ruled ineligible for the non-fiction Hugo (which in turn had already been won by another pop-science book, Tom Weller's *Science Made Stupid*)? Other nominations of British interest include John Clute's *SF: The Illustrated Encyclopedia* as non-fiction, Jim Burns as artist, *Interzone* as semiprozine (Aussie contributor Greg Egan has a couple of shortlisted novellas, too), and two British fanzines, *Ansible* and *Attitude*. Flashing back 50 years, the retro-Hugo novels are "The Mule" by Isaac Asimov (Part II of *Foundation and Empire*), "Red Sun of Danger" by Edmond Hamilton writing as Brett Sterling (novel version *Danger Planet*); *That Hideous Strength* by C. S. Lewis; *Destiny Times Three* by Fritz Leiber, and *The World of Null-A* by A. E. van Vogt. Owing to a word count technicality, Orwell's *Animal Farm* is shortlisted as a novella. 1945's favoured movies are: *Bilie Spirit, The Body Snatcher*, *The Horn Blows at Midnight*, *House of Dracula*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Imagine what a Best of 1995 list voted on in 2045 will look like....

## THE BIRD OF THE DIFFICULT EYE

Harlan Ellison suffered a presumed heart attack on 12 April, and on the 14th underwent an emergency quadruple bypass operation. He left hospital on the 19th to convalesce at home with his wife Susan, and was soon whingeing healthily about receiving (despite loudly expressed wishes that people wouldn't) over 600 get-well calls and faxes, as well as so many flowers that the Ellison mansion "smells like an Algerian whorehouse."

Chris Reed assures enquirers that *Back Brain Recluse* magazine (*Interzone's* feistiest rival) has not died but is merely delayed owing to his new-found success as a freelance graphic designer.

**Franz Rottensteiner** remains almost tight-lipped about his split with Stanislaw Lem: "Since Stanislaw Lem's books no longer sell even in those countries where they once sold, the author has discovered a new source of income: he is asking his ex-agent Franz Rottensteiner to sign letters granting Mr Lem \$50,000 in punitive damages should Rottensteiner make use of Lem's letters in any way whatsoever or insult the author in any way. Strictly factual reporting is allowed. A sure win-situation since the facts in the case are deeply insulting to Mr Lem."

**John Sladek** reported Charles Platt as being "on his way to sit by the bedside of the dying Timothy Leary. Charles belongs to the Cryogenics Society, who are going to freeze the good doctor's head. I suggested that it would be so saturated in high-powered drugs that it would not freeze. I can certainly imagine the freezer being plundered by tattooed kids in search of acid. Can you picture them taking a communion of Leary's brain?"

**H. G. Wells** has become a theme pub: HG's in Peterborough, a Charles Wells establishment. In homage to Wells's most famous sf creations, the PR company had the new pub opened by Jon Pertwee and a brace of Daleks (since "Tom Baker was too expensive"), while its press release credits Wells with *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea*. According to CAMRA spies, the quality of research accurately reflects that of the beer.

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**Awards!** Arthur C. Clarke Award: Paul J. McAuley's *Fairyland*, with Ken McLeod's *The Star Fraction* named as a very close runner-up. Stephen Baxter mutters: "I was sorry to miss out on the ACC but was even more galled with third place (or worse). Apparently I now enter the playoffs for relegation to the Auto Windshield SF Trophy, southern division...." But *The Time Ships* did win the Kurd Lasswitz Award for the best foreign-language novel published in Germany during 1995. James Tiptree Jr Award for "gender-bending" sf: Elizabeth Hand, *Waking The Moon*, and Theodore Roszak, *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein* (tie). Philip K. Dick Award for best US paperback original: Bruce Bethke, *Headcrash*. Nebula Awards... Novel: Robert J. Sawyer, *The Terminal Experiment*. Novella: Elizabeth Hand, "Last Summer at Mars Hill." Novelette: Ursula K. Le Guin, "Solitude." Short: Esther M. Friesner, "Death and the Librarian." Grand Master: A. E. van Vogt.

**Fantasy Encyclopaedia Fun.** Best cross-reference entry so far, surprising

## ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

yet logical: "GUYS ♫ DOLLS." We will pass over the hastily expunged Strange Loop of **REVENGE ♫ VENGEANCE** and **VENGEANCE ♫ REVENGE**, suggesting the possibility of **RECURSIVE FANTASY ♫ RECURSIVE FANTASY**. Most regrettably unwritten theme-entry phrases: in **DARK TOWER**, "... often updated as black-glass skyscrapers; modern London and New York have suffered severe attacks of DTs"; and in **BRAVE LITTLE TAILOR**, "The BLT sandwiches, as it were, the concepts of..."

**R.I.P.** Various deaths in April... Richard Condon (1915-96), famed for *The Manchurian Candidate* and other borderline of works and black comedies. Christopher Robin Milne (1920-96), whose entire life was haunted by his father's Winnie-the-Pooh books. Stirling Silliphant (1918-96), who wrote screenplays for several genre movies including *Charly*, *Village of the Damned* and *The Swarm*. P. L. Travers (1906-96), author of *Mary Poppins* (1934), also died after more than 30 triumphant years of blocking any follow-up to the 1964 Disney movie which she so detested. Nevertheless, certain UK newspapers sensitively headed their obituaries with stills of Julie Andrews.

**Intuition.** This almost-all-female bid for the 1998 UK national sf convention (always held over Easter) routed the all-male opposition "Testostercon: The con with BALLS!" – despite the latter's promise of not only sweat lodges but a Babes Beauty Contest replacing the usual Masquerade. SAE for Intuition details to 43 Onslow Gardens, Wallington, Surrey, SM6 9QH.

**Thog's Science Masterclass.** Voyager publicity flyer, on *Blue Mars*: "Ten things you didn't know about the red planet. [...] 9. Mars is the only planet in the solar system that could sustain human life."

# POP CORN

## MUTANT

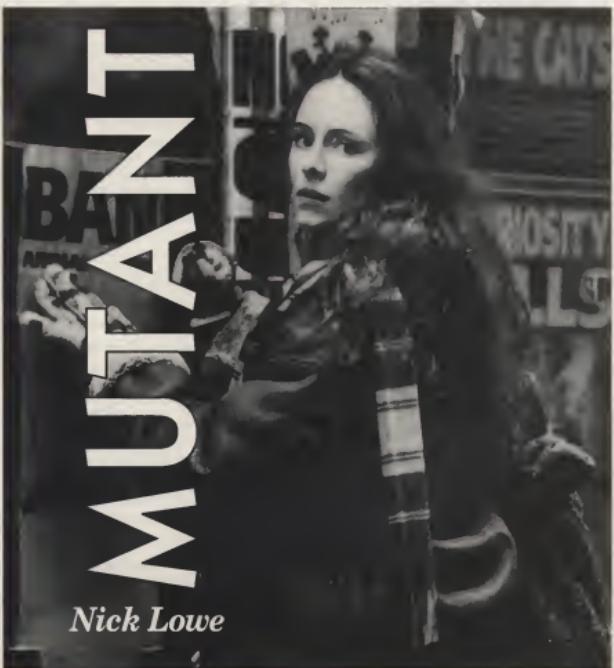
*Nick Lowe*

Its maker likes to claim *12 Monkeys* as a subversive achievement, a "European artfilm made in Hollywood": taking Hollywood money and Hollywood egos, and squandering them on a bleak, despondent minor fugue on themes of memory, failure and futility, remade from a French experimental short from 1963 that nobody behind a desk would even get. Though Terry Gilliam's film itself is more restrained than, say, *Munchausen* about Hollywood being the frontline in the treeless war between the dreamer and the Orwellian machine, it's certainly a theme that dominated in what in effect is the director's making-of companion, his installation at the Hayward's recent *Spellbound* exhibition. (High, dark room divided in half by a towering wall of big black file drawers, behind which the film *12 Monkeys* is inaccessibly projected. Ladders and stools are provided for the stout-hearted to access the higher, but not the highest, drawers. Some slide open, revealing glimpses of the film, documents of its making, or harsh anti-Hollywood jokes. One, front-labelled "The public speaks... and speaks... and speaks..." is a fascinating collection of US audience preview cards – Gilliam has never disguised his loathing of the test screening – disappointingly unanimous in their approval, yet full of strange light into the diversity of

the human spirit. *How would you describe this movie?* "Futuristic." "Very good." "I couldn't really describe it." *Did you find it easy to follow the story?* "It was very clear."

The irony is, though, that Hollywood has been better to Gilliam, and in particular better for him, than he would probably wish to admit; and that, quite aside from its startling profitability, *12 Monkeys* is Gilliam's most humane, his most powerful, and very nearly his finest film largely because of its Hollywood talent and its maker's long-avoided immersion in Hollywood craftsmanship. This isn't to dispute the continuing brilliance of the director and his creative troupe (particularly long-serving cinematographer Roger Pratt, who never gets quite the kudos he ought). But the truth is that if this film had been made entirely in Pinewood with Jonathan Pryce and a script by Gilliam and his friends, it would surely have been a lot more subversive and a lot less good. Before *The Fisher King*, Gilliam was far stronger on image and idea than with character and emotion, and the occasional Hollywood stray like De Niro in *Brazil* seemed uncomfortable in environments scripted and peopled by Brits of widely-varying aptitude. And what *The Fisher King* seems to have achieved, for all its (mostly writerly) follies of grandeur, is to get Gilliam comfortable with directing the Hollywood script and, especially, the Hollywood actor.

Script first. I've never been entirely convinced about David Peoples, whose two celebrated screenplays (*Blade Runner* and *Unforgiven*) are early, and whose more recent work, let's not forget, is represented rather by *Salute of the Jugger* and *Leviathan*. There's no denying the sombre humanity of his distinctive portentous melancholy and his doily haunted heroes, but his often-elliptical plotting isn't always as strong as the ideas driving it, and the *12 Monkeys* script (with his Mrs) is a curious mixture of furious sophistication and barely-controlled incoherence. On the one hand, good time-twister plots done well can be a wonderful showcase for taut, lean plotting, with their jigsaw games with chronology and precise attention to cause and effect. And *12 Monkeys* is certainly sensitive to this, while taking care at the outset to stress that for once this is not a scenario in which history can be changed: that in violation of the Hollywood code, this is a world in which nobody can change their lives or anyone else's, heroes are puppets, and not only can't you have your dream but to dare to dream at all is a pitiful aberration that leads only, as usual in Gilliam world, to despair. If you know



*La Jetée*, in fact, not only do you know the ending from the opening shot, but the inevitability of that ending is precisely the theme of the film and the source of its emotional drive.

On the other hand, a lot of the actual construction is pretty ropey. The narrative raises, but subsequently rather loses, interest in the possibility that Willis's future present may itself be (presently?) hallucinated. There are strange holes in the story – the escape from 1917 to 1996, the introduction and motivation of the pivotal David Morse character – that give the impression of several pages of script having been lost in the wars. Stowe's conversion to her patient's delusion is much too sudden and convenient, and based on some deeply unprofessional logic; if she wanted a reason to believe Bruce was from The Future, you'd think she'd at least remark on his cranial barcodes (interesting how this little viral meme from Gibson's discarded script for *Alien*<sup>3</sup> has escaped to become the defining future-pic cliché of the 90s). The status of the mystery plot-voice Willis hears, and occasionally sees, is annoyingly resolved; you can easily miss what happens on the plane at the end (I did); and within minutes of lights-up it dawns that the one unforeseen element in the climax, the colossal twist in the final reel that proves most of the plot (including the title) to have been a red herring, depends on a whole sequence of coincidences each one of which is so far-fetched as to

undermine all the meticulous appearance of logic that drives the quest in the first place. And as with *The Fisher King*'s grail allegories, there's something tiresomely over-referential and knowing about a cinematic self-consciousness that, not content with quoting key images and ideas from Marker's film, has clumsily to shepherd its characters into a cinema just so they can watch a complete

sequence from *Vertigo*, no less. "I think I've seen this movie before," says Willis, flummoxing for the writers: "when I was a kid, I saw it on TV. It's just like what's happening with us, with the past – the movie never changes, but each time you see it, you see different things." (See? That last bit's not bad, but you could frankly make the same point with *Hercules Versus the Moon Men*.)

If *12 Monkeys* marks an advance on anything in Gilliam's back catalogue, it's surely in the emotional charge he manages to bring to such a poten-

tially mechanical storyline. Some of this, for certain, is in the performances – indeed, it's hard to think of any film with quite this quantity of acting from so few players. Brad Pitt's showstopping monologues come as least surprise, because Gilliam has cast Robin Williams twice and lived, and Pitt does have a similar way of going ballistically bravura when directors let him get away with it. But who would ever have thought there were so many things Bruce Willis could do that had never been exposed on film? The "Blueberry Hill" sequence alone has more technique and power than his whole gig on *Pulp Fiction*, and that's only his side of the frame, while over on the right Madeline Stowe is simultaneously going for the all-time achievement in acting behind a steering wheel without any real lines to work with.

Yet it's still probably the power of Chris Marker's originating idea that makes this most predictable of movies so unpredictably moving (and far more so, it should be said, than the original, which haunts rather than hurts). The Peoples/Gilliam version isn't really interested in *La Jetée*'s Ballardian temporal apocalypse or its associated

narrative games with celluloid time (as everyone remembers, *La Jetée* is told in voice-over stills, but stills sequenced together in a profoundly cinematic way). What it takes, rather, is the setup, the ending, and the central image of the child haunted though apocalypse and beyond by the half-buried memory of the death of the man he becomes. Like Marker's, Peoples'

script tries to tell the unutterable story of the death of the world by eliding it completely from the narrative: arguably a bug, but evidently intended as a feature. There is, pointedly, no attempt to screen even fleetingly the central event of the film: the extinction of most of the human race tomorrow by that most millennial of dooms, a mutant virus (it was WW3 in 1963, an apocalypse equally of its time). Instead, we see the world before and after the extinction, and the incomprehensible vastness of catastrophe is personalized and indi-

vidualized as the loss of one man's childhood world. It's true that this rather undervalues the whole vision by seeming to allow Willis's middle-aged angst more emotional weight than the deaths of five billion anonymi; but it's hard to see what else could have been done, and the hero's lonely grief and confusion does convey more sense of what's been lost than Gilliam's painstaking evocation of the survivors' world, a dangerously self-parodic environment of high ceilings, dark lighting, busy sets, and bakelite, bakelite, bakelite.

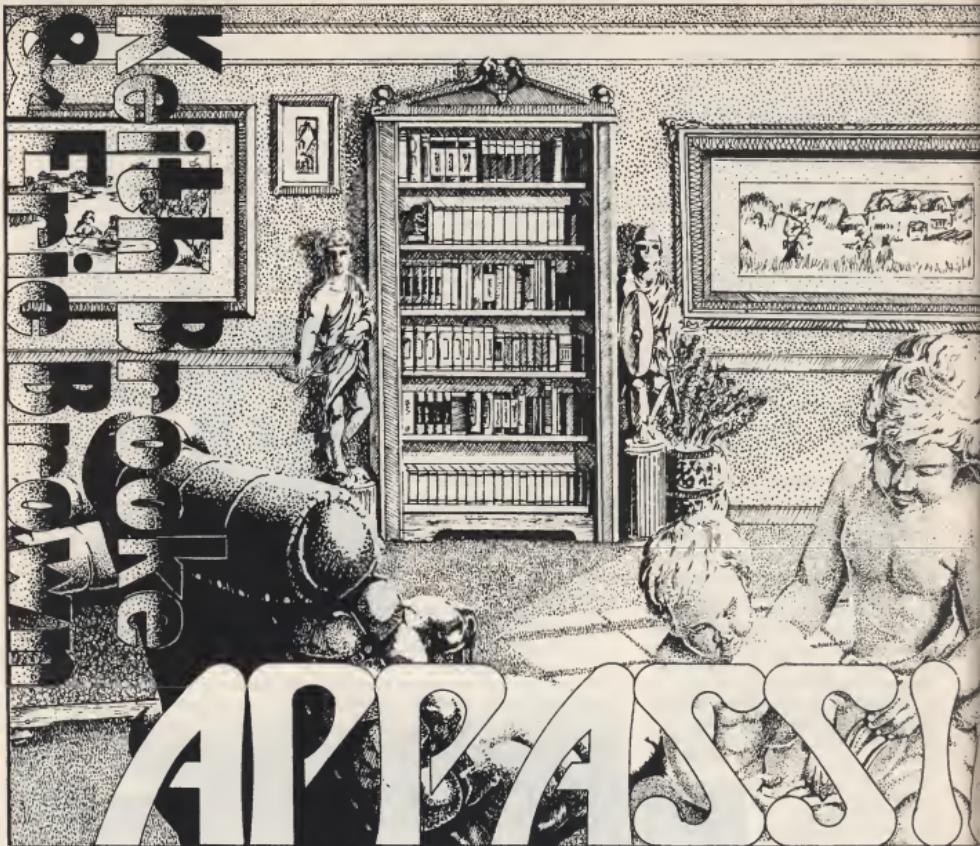
And it may be that this fear of the end of time strikes a deeper and darker chord now than it ever did in our childhoods. What links *12 Monkeys* with the other great sf movie of the mid-90s is its very precise and imminent dating of the apocalyptic future, which seems to testify to a millennial sense of the fragility of this world even more acute than the cold-war dreams of

Marker's era. "Five billion people will die from a deadly virus in 1997," runs the pre-credit captionologue by now obligatory in future movies, but as we later learn "it was released in Philadelphia, probably on December 13 1996" (the anniversary, almost to the day, of *12 Monkeys*' own release: one of several little in-chortles suggestive of a linkage between the virus and the industry). I don't really understand why *12 Monkeys* should have done so well and the more conventionally entertaining *Strange Days* so poorly. But it would be nice if one consequence was that we didn't have to wait another five years for Gilliam to zip on his shooting suit and venture into the infected city – not least because by then the *enfant terrible* will be 60, the millennium will have come and gone, and we'll probably ALL BE DEAD or living in the sewers like alligators, or hiding out from invaders from the future who have infiltrated our world disguised as invisible alien non-smoking rubber beetroot people with scary mustaches masking they have no lip. Nurse! Nurse!

Nick Lowe



Opposite Madeleine Stowe as psychiatrist Kathryn Railly, above left Bruce Willis as time traveller James Cole, and above right Brad Pitt as the lunatic Jeffery Goines in *Twelve Monkeys*.



Mae Chang brought her hands down on the last chord of "Appassionata" and hung her head over the keyboard – drained, as ever, by the sonata which had become most closely identified with her playing. As the notes died in the vast auditorium the silence was replaced by the nebulous roar of applause.

Moving on autopilot, Mae stood, stepped forward and dropped a bow to the faceless audience, her arms hanging loose like those of a marionette. A blonde girl, only a few years younger than Mae herself, pranced forward, primly erect, with a bouquet of red roses. The ovation increased.

Trying to ignore the facial perfection of the girl – a mere 14 or 15 and already she had been surgically beautified – Mae hoisted the bouquet like a trophy and performed another bow.

She could take no more.

She rushed off-stage, holding back the tears. The crowd would think she was being modest: lovely Mae Chang, refusing to bask in the glory. She hated them all.

Anton Selig was waiting in the wings. She let him hug her, ignoring his gush of superlatives. When she tried to pull free, his hands moved to her shoulders,

turned her. "They want you, Mae, darling," he said. "They need you."

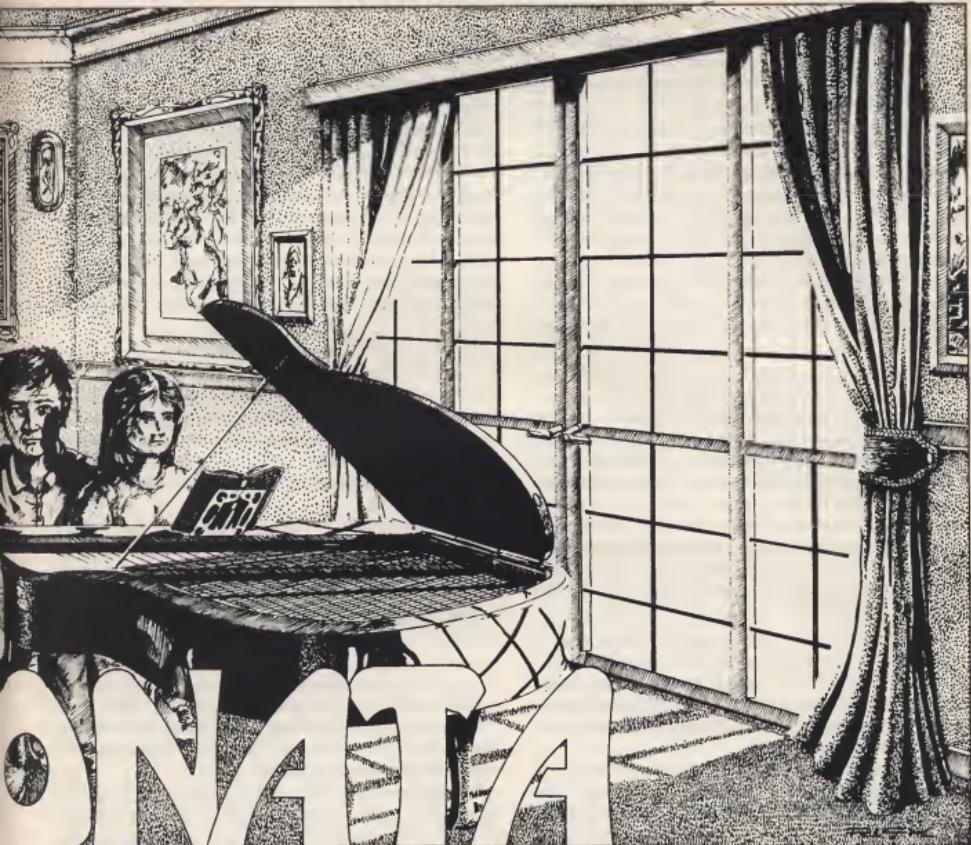
She let him propel her back on-stage to receive her ovation.

She dropped her head and waited for it to end. After the sublimity of the Beethoven, she must confront this charade, this mindless adulation of her so-called genius. She knew the audience did not, as Anton claimed, love her: what they loved was their own appreciation of what they were told was great music. This specious love – from the audience, from her manager, from the media and all the attendant sycophants – served only to point up the fact of her loneliness.

This time when she hurried off she brushed past Anton, past the gawping stagehands, the groupies and the snapping paparazzi. By the time she reached her dressing room she was running.

She slammed the door behind her, exhausted and, at the same time, curiously excited. Now she could look forward to a reprieve of three weeks before Paris, Milan and New York. She would practise as it suited her and, for the first time in 18 months, she would take a holiday.

Three weeks' respite.



Illustrations by Rick Dawson

Her tears had dried by the time a tentative rap sounded on the door.

"Yes?"

Anton edged in, burdened with flowers. Two men, one a cameraman, accompanied him. She let them record her removing her make-up, going through the cards attached to the flowers. After a short, non-penetrative interview, the cameraman left.

The other man remained. She had assumed he was with the cameraman. She studied him more closely now: small and grey-suited, a trim moustache at odds with a long grey pony-tail, he stood confidently before her.

"Mae," said Anton. "I'd like you to meet Conrad Ventori."

"Ms Chang. An exhilarating performance." Ventori took her hand, kissed it. Mae squirmed at the intimacy.

Anton opened a carton of Moët et Chandon, then one of Diet Coke for Mae. "Signor Ventori has a fascinating business proposition to put to you — one which I feel we should consider quite closely."

Ventori leaned casually against the wall, although Mae realized that there was little about this man which could be described as "casual".

"I represent the multimedia arm of PK Syntronics.

Our labels include Galaxy, Romulus, Beatle, Indotron — I expect you are aware of us?"

Mae was careful to keep a blank expression on her face, standard camouflage. The unthinkingly racist newsgroups liked to describe her cultivated blank responses as "inscrutable".

"I am already under contract," she told him. Why was Anton wasting her time like this?

"Please, Mae," said her manager. "Give Signor Ventori a few minutes of your time."

Ventori continued, untroubled by Mae's attempted rudeness. "I understand from your manager that you have a break before you next perform in Paris. PKS would like to extend our hospitality by proposing that you take a week's working holiday at our facility near Périgueux in the Dordogne. Your manager confirms that it does not contravene your arrangement with Sony-EMI."

Mae looked from Ventori to her manager. "A 'working holiday'?" She loaded the phrase with all the sarcasm she could muster. In the mirror she saw that, without make-up, she looked like a petulant child.

"Many of our artistes use the Chateau d'Arouet. It is well-equipped and secluded. I guarantee that in your

time there you will not be hounded by the paparazzi and other filth of today's sorry world. Indeed, one of our artistes – something of a prodigy – will be sharing the facilities with you. We would be very interested in seeing the two of you working together."

Anton leaned forward. "Two hundred thousand Euros just for your time," he said.

Mae was aware of Anton's restraint. He would say no more – he knew just how far to push her – but he wanted that money. Two hundred thousand Euros meant nothing to Mae, but the seclusion Ventori offered was seductive.

"Okay," she said, and turned away, determined to retain her cool facade. "I need a break – I will do it."

It was only later that she asked herself, *Do what, exactly?*



She woke in her room, secure in the heart of the Chateau d'Arouet.

As soon as PKS's Corsair had landed at Limoges the previous evening she had felt a sense of peace – of safety – descending. She had spent the flight from Helsinki cocooned under a headset, playing Sectrix, listening to various music stations – they were all playing tracks from the new Lennon album at the moment – and, just to remind herself of the awfulness of the world, watching the various news channels. Famine in China and most of Africa; human rights groups protesting in Brussels about the introduction of a new law sanctioning the "psychological adjustment" of the criminally insane; civil war in any number of cities that all looked alike in their ruination; the Pacific states panicking about the rising seas.

A polite young French woman had greeted her and led her through the airport building – no cameras, no armed guards, only a few sudden looks of recognition – and into an unmarked company car which was to take her the remaining 70 kilometres to the chateau.

The Dordogne was beautiful in a way that the most beautiful places, with their souvenir shops and cafeterias, their holiday parks and congestion, had long ceased to be. The wooded hills were cloaked in the sun's gold as they drove to the chateau that evening, a sight she would treasure, so untainted by modernity.

The chateau itself was an ugly mix of the new and the old, but its clearly visible security was reassuring: the guards at the gate, the high wall patrolled by dogs with sensor-packs mounted across their shoulders. In a world as volatile as today's, the rich took such protection for granted.

She slept well that night, and woke ready for whatever the day would bring.

She was surprised to see Ventori when she was shown down to the breakfast room. Her facade must have slipped, for he smiled and said, "I am on a working holiday also." He paused, then went on. "You have complete freedom of the chateau, although I caution you not to go too close to the perimeter wall: the dogs are programmed to stay within ten metres of it, and to apprehend any human who enters that zone. It gives us peace of mind.

"If you wish to explore – the cathedral at Périgueux might interest you, or perhaps the caves at Lascaux – then a car will take you. All we require is that you work for two hours of each day."

She nodded, then sipped at the lapsang souchong she had requested. "What work is it that you 'require'?" she asked. "Am I to teach your prodigy?" She suspected she had been brought here to teach the marginally talented child of one of PKS's directors. The rich seemed unable to put aside the naive belief that talent was a commodity to be bought and sold.

She wanted to ask more, but she held back, as ever; any betrayal that she was interested or curious was a sign of weakness, one that would always be seized by those around her.

Ventori finished wiping his mouth on a napkin, then said, "When you are ready, Ms Chang, I will introduce you to Jonathan Graves. He has a phenomenal gift for composition and he has reached the stage where his current work should be performed by a virtuoso. If it is satisfactory, and if you are in agreement, then I am certain that it can be arranged for you to record this work."

Mae said nothing. She sipped at her tea, then meticulously stripped the flesh from a segment of cantaloupe melon. Let them wait. If she must spend two hours a day with some gauche, talentless composer – far worse than mere tutoring – then they could damn well wait.



Ventori paused in the corridor by a pair of doors. "Ms Chang," he said. "Jonathan is a genius. But he has been... rather *confused* of late. His behaviour can sometimes be a little erratic."

He released her arm and pushed ahead of her through the door on the left. The sound of a piano – hesitant and somehow constrained – rose up as Mae followed Ventori into the room.

It was furnished in the style of an old-fashioned drawing room, with over-stuffed settees and armchairs, dark oil paintings, dowdy statues of Greek gods. At the far end of the room, before full-length picture windows overlooking the lawn, was a grand piano. A man in his late 30s or early 40s sat before the keyboard. From time to time he turned to a small table at his side to scribble notes on a big pad.

Mae shook her head. The term "prodigy" had implied someone younger, perhaps even younger than herself.

They stood for several minutes while Jonathan Graves ignored them.

Mae watched as his large fingers found the notes with the lazy ease of a natural – if somewhat limited – player. He worried at a particular phrase over and over, as if he was not happy with it.

If that was the case, then at least his judgement was sound, Mae decided. He should be writing tracks for shampoo commercials.

When he was ready, he placed his pen with a flourish and twisted to appraise his visitors with a fierce look. "Yes?" he snapped.

There was something peculiar about him, but Mae could not quite place it. His face was long, his dark hair

greying at the temples. It was his eyes, she realized: their watery, slightly glazed look, his rapid blinking – almost a tic – serving to betray his facade of hostility. Mae smiled. She knew all about hiding behind facades.

Ventori was not perturbed by Jonathan's response. "Mr Graves," he said. "I'd like to introduce Mae Chang. Ms Chang wishes to learn your music. Mae, this is Jonathan Graves."

From his sitting position, Graves stared up at Mae. Finally, he nodded. His peculiar mixture of aggression and confusion gave him the air of someone suffering some kind of mental illness. "You..." He stopped himself, seeming to change his mind. "I am pleased to meet you," he said. "Dr Ventori tells me that you play the piano."

She had been right: only a psychiatric patient could not have heard of Mae Chang.

"A little," she said, and smiled again. This week might prove diverting after all, she decided.

"In that case... I am in the process of putting the finishing touches to a piano sonata. Perhaps you would care to try it out?"

"I'll leave you in peace," said Ventori. He opened the full-length window and stepped outside.

Mae watched his retreating figure as he headed across the lawns. She turned as Graves started to fuss through a stack of manuscript pages torn from the large pad.

"It's here, it's *here*," he said, getting increasingly irate when he failed to find a particular sheet. "Hal!" He waved a page in the air, then placed the complete manuscript on the piano. He shuffled along the piano stool, then patted the space he had created. "Sit down," he said. "Let me hear how good you are."

There was barely room for the two of them, but Graves made no sign of moving any farther. Mae sat, her thigh pressed against the Englishman's. She stared at the manuscript, trying to decipher the haphazard scrawl.

She struck the first chord and instantly felt the recoil in Graves's body next to hers. "No!" he cried. "*Pianissimo*. Can you not read manuscript?"

She said nothing, simply started again, more softly. Graves shook his head but allowed her to continue.

"No, no!" he cried again, barely two bars in. He turned to her, his face so close she could feel the breath on her cheeks. "Your wrists, your hands – you're too stiff. Here –" he took one of her hands and caressed it between both of his – your fingers should be loose and relaxed, not stiff like a donkey's dick!"

She snatched her hand away, stared down at the keyboard.

He was chuckling. "Good," he said. "Very good. Passion. Now play my sonata!"

This time he sat back and let her play it all the way through. When she had finished she sat quietly, like an academy schoolgirl waiting for her next lesson.

"You play it quite well," Graves acknowledged at last. He seemed less sure of himself now. "Can I beg your professional opinion?"

She smiled. "It... resonates," she said. She was relieved when he interpreted this as approval. She had been promised a prodigy, a man blessed with a phenomenal gift. Jonathan Graves' only gift was for imi-

tation, pastiche. Elements of Haydn, of Mozart and, more than anything, of Beethoven. His only originality was to be probably the only composer producing early Romantic music in the 21st century. Jonathan was skilful – at times astonishingly so – and demonstrably passionate about his music, but he was little more than a copyist, a hack.

She wondered why PK Syntronics should spend their time and money on a man who was little better than a plagiarist?

She left him staring out of the windows.

In the corridor she hesitated, then opened the door next to Jonathan's. The room it revealed was painted white. Set into the facing wall was a large picture-screen on which Mae could see the drawing room, Jonathan seated at the piano, playing a simple three-note phrase over and over, over and over.

Ventori was alone in the viewing room, seated in a recliner, staring out at Graves over steamed fingers. He looked up in surprise, then opened his mouth to speak. Before he could utter a sound, Mae shut the door and headed for her room.



She took a light lunch alone, still triumphant at trapping Ventori at his games. Later, she settled at the Steinway in the practice suite adjoining her room to work on the Schumann piano concerto she would play in Paris.

Late in the afternoon she was interrupted by a knock at the door: a servant relaying a request from Jonathan that she join him.

Jonathan had moved the piano stool so that he could sit staring out across the gardens. His posture spoke of depression.

"You asked me to come," said Mae, crossing the room. He had another hour of her time to use today, but that did not mean she had to make it easy for him.

He made no response. He stared at his hands, clasped between his knees. Mae positioned herself on the arm of a chair, so that she was in his line of vision. "Do you want me to play again?"

He looked up then, desolation in his eyes. All his earlier arrogance had fled. "I couldn't work," he said. "When I heard you play I was suddenly aware of the sparseness of the piece, the false economies I had used in my haste to produce something. And the solutions were there before me, ready to be plucked from the air. But..."

"But?" Mae could not help but empathize with Jonathan's wretched state. She knew the desolation creation could bring.

"But... I lost it. It's gone."

"It'll come again," said Mae. All she could give him were platitudes. "It needs time."

"You're sure?" he said, his tone suddenly hostile, accusatory. "You know about these things, do you? I suppose you're in Ventori's pocket, just like all the others, aren't you? You just want me to write. You just want to make money out of me."

She was taken aback by the sudden swing in his mood. Only a minute earlier he had seemed so vulnerable she had even been willing to forgive him his crudeness of this morning. Most hateful of all was his accusation that she

was just like all the others: motivated only by greed. "He pays me, yes," she said. She kept her face expressionless. Let him think what he liked.

There was a silence then, time for Jonathan to visibly calm himself. Finally, he said, "Please, Mae. Will you tell me what's happening here?"

"I am a pianist," she said. "They pay me to play your music for two hours a day. Beyond that I know little."

Jonathan looked around the room. "I know they watch me," he said. "And I have some memories of a time before this. I know I was in a hospital once, that I was ill."

Now Mae was convinced that he was some kind of psychiatric patient. PK Syntronics had discovered an *idiot savant*, someone they thought they could turn into some kind of musical production line. He certainly had a gift. It was just like the Academy, she mused: coaxing talent into full fruition. Only, this chateau in the depths of the Dordogne was a far more pleasant setting than that grim stone complex in Wenzhou.

Jonathan had risen and now he slid open the French windows. Glancing back into the room, he said, "I like to walk. You'll join me?" There was a hint of his former brashness returning to his tone, to his mannerisms.

Mae shrugged, but stood nonetheless. She hated to admit it but she was intrigued. For the first time since she was a child, she wanted to find out more about another human being.

They walked across the gently sloping lawns, descending towards a neat circular lake. As the chateau diminished behind them, Mae felt pressure lifting from her shoulders. She glanced back at the building, a curious mix of the modern and what Ventori had told her was an 18th-century manor house, one of the last to be built before the Revolution. The modern rarely blended well with the old, she thought.

It was warm for so late in the afternoon in the early autumn. A cooling breeze blew downy seeds across the surface of the lake.

Jonathan had said nothing since they left his room. Mae looked at him. He no longer seemed depressed. His expression was that of a child, eyes half-closed. Listening, she realized. To the sound of the breeze, of the chattering swallows dipping low across the wind-rilled lake. Perhaps he was genuinely gifted after all, she thought: there could be few people so fascinated by the everyday sounds of nature.

Confirming her thoughts, he said, "Listen. There's music in everything." Suddenly he reached out and pinched the lobe of her ear. "Such an under-used organ," he continued, as she jerked away from his touch. "I sometimes sit here for hours, just listening to the world. Every sound I hear is a gift from the Lord."

Later, as they reached the far side of the lake, Jonathan said, "Such an illusion of freedom." He gestured all around. "Open lawns, a lake, forest... But it is all enclosed. I have explored. There is a wall, patrolled by guards and by strange-looking dogs carrying devices strapped to their backs. I am granted the freedom of the chateau, but I am effectively a prisoner."

"We can leave whenever we choose," said Mae, uncertainly, recalling Ventori's words. "The security is to protect us from the world, not to restrain us. It is a

fact of life for those with money."

Jonathan seemed to have lost interest. His moods were so inconstant.

"How did you come to be here?" She was showing curiosity, betraying a weakness.

She waited for him to seize on it, but instead he said, simply, "I honestly do not know."

"But where were you before? What did you do?" She would know if he had been successful as a composer and, with his clumsy style, he was clearly not a musician.

"Before? It seems that I had another life, very different from this one. But my memory is hazy. What little I can recall seems unreal and contradictory. The only part of my life that is real for me is the present: I am here in this pampered seclusion. Ventori wants me to compose and—" suddenly, violently, he struck his chest "—I feel this desperate need to compose, yet it does not come out in the shapes I carry in my head."

He turned to her, took her hand, gripping it so hard she could not extract it. "They're using me, Mae Chang. They want my music and they offer me riches, but my happiness is of no concern to them!"

Mae eased her hand out of his grip. She thought of Anton, of Ventori, of her parents growing fat off her money back in Quxian... of all the two-faced greedy agents, lawyers, promoters and publicists with whom she spent much of her working life. She smiled at Jonathan, said, "I know how you feel."

She turned away. There was something in his posture, his odd mix of arrogance and vulnerability, that was reaching out to her.

"And you?" asked Jonathan, as they started to head back towards the chateau. "You are a pianist, I know. You have come to learn my music. Where are you from?"

She thought of Wenzhou, the Academy. Of how the Chinese authorities had seized on the idea of creating a new generation of world-beating musicians just as they had created a generation of athletes 20 years earlier. She had left Wenzhou at the age of ten, for the Taipei Conservatory and later, the London School of Music.

"Nowhere any more," she said quietly. Concerts around the world since the age of 14, international stardom and acclaim. The sheer, heart-rending *emptiness* of it all.

"How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

They approached the chateau. Jonathan paused outside the drawing room and looked up into the clear blue sky at the fluffing contrail of a long-gone jet. Then he cocked his head, listening intently again.

Mae listened too, and at first she could hear only silence interrupted by the occasional sounds of birds—but then she made out the distant, almost subliminal, drone of traffic.

Jonathan stepped inside, shaking his head. "The world is so strange," he said.

He stopped by the piano, played a top C five times as if he was ringing a bell. "You will play the sonata again, I think. I feel ready to work."

He had used up his two hours for today, but Mae resisted the impulse to walk straight past him and out of the door. She sat at the piano, sharing the stool as before, and waited as Jonathan started to scribble

on his pad. Twenty minutes later he thrust two sheets of music at her and instructed her to play.

She gathered herself, then studied the changes he had made to the opening sequence of the slower second movement. When she was sure of herself she played, happy that Jonathan remained quiet by her side, his eyes closed and his head dipped, as if in prayer.

He nodded when she had finished, then turned to the next page of manuscript.

They worked through the score minutely, a page or two at a time. At nine o'clock a bell rang for dinner and Mae surfaced with a heady sense of accomplishment. For a mere copyist, Jonathan certainly had an acute critical faculty: he had identified many of the weaknesses Mae had spotted, but he had also made changes that overcame flaws she had failed to detect.

Now, returning to the real world, Mae smiled at Jonathan, aware of the intimacy they had shared for the last few hours.

Jonathan smiled back, then he seized her face in his big hands and forced his mouth onto hers. At first, she was too startled to resist, and his tongue forced itself deep into her mouth, so that she almost retched.

As his hand moved down her body and found one small breast she bit hard.

He cried out, and as he pulled away he fell off the stool they had shared.

Mae forced herself to stay calm as she stood and looked down at him, sprawled on the floor. Slowly, she turned and walked across to the door. She would not let him know that he had scared her, she would not give him that victory.

When she reached her own room she was sick in the basin.



He summoned her late the next afternoon and they worked through until dinner, establishing a routine that was repeated the following day. The events of the first evening went unmentioned, although it was noticeable that Jonathan did not press against her quite so intensely when they sat next to each other at the piano.

She watched Jonathan carefully, ready for any sudden swing in his mood. She had seen behaviour like this in a conductor who had later been exposed as a drug abuser. She remembered hearing somewhere that many of the symptoms of psychiatric patients were a result of the brain-altering drugs they were being treated with, rather than their condition. Perhaps that was the explanation for Jonathan's shifting moods: a mixture of mental instability and whatever – perhaps innovative – drugs they were using to treat him.

She found herself drawn ever deeper into the mystery of this man and his uncanny gift. Indeed, at the end of the third day she realized that not once had she used the TV in her room, her usual fix – a reminder of the awfulness of the real world. The time with Jonathan was a time apart.

Over the first half of their week together, Mae wondered how she might get closer to Jonathan Graves. It seemed that to know him was impossible, as he hardly knew himself. He was adrift in a world that made little sense to him, his music his only anchor to reality,



his only connection – apart from his lust – with Mae. Sometimes, during breaks from their work, Mae ventured tentative questions about his past: she asked about his childhood, asked about the places he had visited, the people he knew. On these occasions he withdrew into himself, losing the animation and enthusiasm of creation and becoming lost, confused.

At the end of her third full day at the Chateau d'Arouet, she left Jonathan's drawing room early. When she poked her head around the door of the viewing room, she saw a man she did not know. In his white over-suit he looked like a medic.

"I want to see Dr Ventori," she said.

The man nodded, then spoke into a phone. "He'll be in the morning room in five minutes," he told her.

When she entered the morning room – a long, narrow hall in the old part of the building – she saw Ventori standing with his back to her, admiring the view along the drive towards the entrance gates. He turned. "Ah, Ms Chang," he said. "Might I ask how the work is proceeding?"

He would know already, of course. He was making small talk. Mae struggled to remind herself of how she handled such situations. To her surprise, she realized how far she had let her defences lapse in the last three days.

She shrugged, made her expression blank. "That all depends on what criteria you choose to judge by. You realize, of course, that his composition is far from original?"

Ventori nodded. "Jonathan shows certain influences, I agree. That is no bad thing, in my opinion: merely to be so good is original enough these days."

"Where did you find him?" Revealing her curiosity, her weakness.

"Jonathan has a long history of mental instability, Ms Chang. For much of his life he has been institutionalized. His gift was identified by an enlightened junior doctor –"

"And PK Syntronics sees commercial possibilities in the work of such an *idiot savant*."

Ventori smiled, nodded.

After a little more of the obligatory small talk, Mae returned to her room. Ventori had confirmed her suspicions, yet the encounter had done little to dislodge her own uncertainties.

As she climbed the stairs and walked through the now-familiar maze of empty corridors, she felt – not for the first time – that her every move was being watched, recorded. Before she fell asleep, it came to her that she and Jonathan were like rats in a maze.



The following morning she asked to be driven into the nearby town of Périgueux. She needed to get away for a time.

She felt a heady sense of release as she jumped from the Mercedes and lost herself in the flow of people. She visited a succession of boutiques, trying on outfit after outfit. The fact that she could buy whatever she wanted meant little to her, but she still experienced that same childish thrill she had first felt as a small girl in Taipei when she had seen the shops, all the

goods stacked high.

Finally, the puritan peasant in her rebelled and she retreated to a McDonalds for a Coke and fries.

It was then that she understood how much she had enjoyed these last three days: the uninterrupted practices in the suite adjoining her room, the naive eagerness of Jonathan's composition. She resolved to tell Anton, when she rejoined him in Paris, that she must have more times when she could shut herself away from the world like this.

She noticed a woman, sitting across from her at another window booth. She was in her mid-30s, her features plain and undistinctive, her clothing casual. Every so often this woman had glanced over the glossy pages of her *Cosmopolitan* at Mae: not the familiar look of one who has recognized the famous – this was more discreet, more purposeful.

As the truth dawned, Mae felt her brief sense of release being dragged away. She should have expected it: even here, they were watching her.



That afternoon, following the routine they had established, Mae went to the drawing room. As ever, she had no idea which Jonathan would await her, where he would be on the spectrum from nervous and confused to brash and passionate.

He was bent over his large pad, scribbling notes as fast as he could.

"Hello." He barely glanced up at the sound of her voice. She went across to the windows and looked out, waiting.

Finally, out of the corner of her eye, she saw him look up. There was an expression of triumph on his face, but it was rapidly replaced by uncertainty, caution.

"Is it ready?" she asked quietly.

"I... No. Not quite."

But it must be close, she could tell. She took the manuscript from his hands and placed it on the piano. As she studied the notes, she saw that he must have worked through the night: the entire opening movement had been transformed so that now it suddenly pulled together everything that was to follow, drawing the listener in, tantalising, entrancing.

She took a deep breath, then started to play.

It was even better than she had anticipated: she would never have believed it possible to craft a piece such as this from that which had preceded it.

She remembered Ventori's words: that to show influence was no bad thing, that merely to be good was original enough. This sonata was still decidedly Beethoven, but now it was more than just Beethoven, it was as if Jonathan had added something of himself to the piece, something personal.

When she had finished she sat slumped at the piano, the last note still suspended in the air. Finally, she turned to Jonathan. "It is magnificent," she said. She realized that she was crying.

Jonathan opened his eyes and looked at her. He reached out and took her hands in his. "I thought I had lost it," he said. "Or... or I never knew I had it. I don't know."

Impetuously, Mae leaned forward and kissed him

on the cheek. His mood was still subdued. She did not know what to do.

Tentatively, she extracted her hands and held them poised over the black and white keys of the Steinway. She played the first subdued notes of "Appassionata", the most intensely personal of Beethoven's piano sonatas.

Jonathan rose abruptly and walked across to the French windows. Suddenly, he hauled them open and started to run.

Mae stopped in dismay. Soon, Jonathan's figure was tiny, reduced in perspective like a character on TV. Gradually, it dawned on her how crass she had been. By playing this piece she could have been implying that Jonathan was still a copyist, or that no matter how good he was he could never approach the master. How cruel and unthinking to confront him – at the climax of his own creativity – with proven genius!

She went and stood on the lawn, staring down at Jonathan's retreating form. For a moment, the old barriers were up: she should shut herself off, retreat, hide her weaknesses.

With an almighty shudder she started to run, following Jonathan.

She reached the lake and paused to regain her breath. For a moment she had lost sight of him, then she saw that he was lingering in a small stand of trees, watching her. She composed herself, then walked across to join him.

For a long time they stood in silence, staring out across the coruscating expanse of water.

"That tune," he said, then stopped.

Beethoven did not write *tunes*, she wanted to say, but she stopped herself. "Beethoven," she said, instead. "I meant..." She did not know what she had meant – some kind of compliment, she hoped.

Jonathan looked puzzled. "Beethoven," he repeated. It was as if the name was new to him.

Mae reached out and took his hand. "Come along," she said, backing away from him like a child pulling at a kite. "Come and listen."

He sat next to her on the piano stool with his eyes closed, just as he had before. All the time she played, he did not move.

When she had finished, he opened his eyes. The blankness in his gaze frightened her for a moment, then he turned and kissed her.

This time she did not pull away, did not resist. She liked the feel of him against her, his almost animal smell. She liked his hands on her body, the sensations he stirred deep inside her.

Some time later, they lay together in his bedroom, clinging to each other like the sole survivors of some terrible shipwreck.

In the morning, she left him to his work. "The piece is finished," she told him, but he would not accept that it was. She asked Ventori for the car to take her into town again.



As the car swept down the drive and joined the main road, Mae caught a glimpse of an open-topped MG pulled up in a gateway. The Mercedes accelerated and Mae turned in her seat: the MG was following closely

enough for her to see that the driver was the plain woman she had noticed in town the previous day.

Mae climbed out in the town centre. They could follow her if they liked. She made her way straight to the McDonalds. Junk food, TV and pop music were her vices. She ordered Coke and fries and went to sit by the window.

A short time later, the woman entered and to Mae's surprise approached her booth.

She seemed nervous. "We must talk."

Mae maintained a neutral expression. "About?"

"About what's going on at the chateau."

Mae was taken aback. She gestured at the seat opposite and the woman lowered herself into it. "Aren't you..." She stopped. She had been mistaken. "I thought you were working for PK Syntronics."

"Me?" The woman was clearly surprised at the suggestion. "I thought you were working for them."

Mae hesitated. "I have been hired by them," she said. "But I am not in the company's employment, as such. I am a pianist. I –"

"I know," said the woman. "You're Mae Chang. I have your 'Liebesträume'. I recognized you." She paused, then added, "I'm sorry: I know who you are, but I still haven't explained who I am." She smiled, nervously. "My name is Isabelle Graves. I'm looking for someone – I hoped you might be able to help."

*Isabelle Graves.* Mae struggled to keep her face blank. Hiding her weakness. "Who are you looking for?" she asked in a small voice.

"My husband," said Isabelle. "His name is Jonathan. I believe he is at the Chateau d'Arouet. Have you, by any chance, met him?"

Mae swallowed, remembered the Press labels: be inscrutable! "Yes," she said. "Jonathan is at the chateau. I am working with him on his new sonata."

"His sonata?" Isabelle looked startled. "Jonathan?"

Mae nodded, keeping her eyes averted.

"But Jonathan has never written a note of music in his life. I mean, he loves music, of course, but he can't even play a kazoo." She was silent for a moment, studying Mae closely. "Can you tell me what's going on out there? Why all this secrecy?"

"What do you mean?"

"Jonathan is a cultural historian. His research has been funded by PK Syntronics for three years – first on a rolling six month contract, then, in May, they extended it to five years. I last saw him over a month ago. He told me he was going away for a short period, that it was top secret. He was on a big bonus, he said, but I knew there was more to it than that: there was something that had hooked his interest. I knew it was no good opposing him. But I thought he'd at least keep in touch with me."

"You heard nothing?"

Isabelle shook her head. "I only found out where they've put him by breaking into his work files at home. I want to know what's going on, why all the mystery?"

Mae shook her head. "I really don't know," she said. "Your husband has written a magnificent piece of music, in the early Romantic style. I rehearse it with him and hope, one day, to be allowed to record it." She decided not to worry the woman with the fact that her husband had no memory of her, or of his life outside the chateau.

Isabelle sighed. "I'm sorry," she said. "I shouldn't have bothered you. You must get hassled all the time." Then she smiled. "I don't know why I've left it so late, in any case: he'll be back in three days."

The announcement shocked Mae. She reminded herself that her contract was only for one week. But how could Jonathan return to England in his current aberrant mental state?

She glanced at her watch. "I'm sorry," she said, hurriedly. "I must be getting back. Excuse me, please."

"Of course. One thing: is Jonathan keeping well?"

Looking down at the table again, Mae nodded. "Yes. Yes, he's fine."

She turned away, went out into the street, her expression blank.



That night, she stayed with Jonathan again, feeling a new kind of guilt, of betrayal.

She pushed her fingers through the tangles of his hair and whispered, "Can you remember *anything* from before the chateau?"

In the pale moonlight, she saw Jonathan's brow crease. The man she loved. All afternoon and evening she had fought to hide from him the pain she felt inside. "Anything?" she repeated, hoping that, in a flash, he would recall his previous life, that he had never been married and Isabelle had been lying.

"Like a dream, half-forgotten as you wake," he said. "Even as you try to grasp the shards of memory they flee, become indistinct. Some faces, I recall. Buildings... a cobbled square and the tall spire of a magnificent church or cathedral." He shook his head. "I know I have recalled other snippets at other times, but it never slots together. Before I was here, before I had you, Mae, I was not a complete person."

He turned to her, stroked her cheek. "The past is gone," he said. "The present is what is important. And the future."

Mae pressed her face into his chest, trying to hide her agony.



For the next two days they were inseparable. Even when Jonathan composed, Mae sat quietly in the room, watching him, loving him. She wanted to store every moment they shared so that she might fill the long days ahead with these memories.

He finished the sonata, although he would not admit it, had to keep tinkering, making changes he would later undo.

Whenever she could, Mae tried to get hold of Ventori, only to be told by whoever she found that he was unavailable but would speak to her at the earliest opportunity. Finally, she tackled a woman who had been watching them from the observation room.

"Tell Dr Ventori I must see him," Mae demanded. "He brought me here under false pretences and I have reason to believe he has done the same – if not worse – to Mr Graves. If these circumstances are made public I can make sure PK Syntronics' reputation is dragged through the shit! Do you hear me?"

The woman was clearly stunned by Mae's onslaught.

"Dr Ventori will be back tomorrow," she said. "He cannot see you before then."

Mae smiled. "Is it true that Mr Graves is leaving tomorrow?"

The woman nodded. "That's right," she confirmed. "Tomorrow afternoon."



That night Jonathan seemed amused by her passion, concerned at her tears. "Mae," he said. "Mae. What's troubling you?"

She laid her head on his chest, so close to telling him – of his wife, of the inevitable awfulness of the world – but she knew that would be cruel. There was nothing she could do about it.

The following morning Mae played the finished sonata all the way through and it was the performance of a lifetime. Afterwards, she smiled at Jonathan through her tears.

Ventori arrived at noon, accompanied by two medics. "Time for some more therapy," he told Jonathan.

Jonathan was studying Mae's carefully composed features. "Mae?" he said, clearly sensing something amiss.

She made herself smile, said, "See you at dinner, Jonathan, my love." In silence, she watched him pass from the room.

When he had gone, she turned to Ventori. "Tell me the truth," she said. "I have met his wife."

He was visibly surprised by that: a chink in his otherwise meticulous planning.

"I apologize for the subterfuge," said Ventori. "But I believe it was necessary: you would never even have listened to me if I had asked you to come and work with Beethoven. I had to offer you what you wanted: peace, escape, refuge."

"But..." How could Jonathan be Beethoven?

"Mr Graves is a historical research technician with PK Syntronics. He was working as part of a team studying the memetic patterns of Beethoven's work when he was selected for his current role. Musicologists identified the recurrent themes and patterns of Beethoven's work, the individual techniques and variations which are uniquely his own: his memes, to use the jargon. Historical psychologists studied the man himself: the key points in his life, his influences, what made him function as an individual different from all others. When all of these elements have been broken down to their essential units – quantized, if you like – it is possible to reconstruct from them a functional model of an individual's creative processes."

Mae interrupted him. "But that has been done already," she said. "What about Lennon, Gershwin, Marley?" These programmed simulacra had been churning out material commercially for at least five years – Bowie's latest opera was created in collaboration with his own memetic model. A new Lennon song was identifiably John Lennon, but it was never really *Lennon*.

Ventori nodded, as if pleased with the progress of a troublesome pupil. "But never before has such a finely detailed simulacrum been produced," he said. "Never before has such a model been programmed into a volunteer's brain by a carefully executed programme of

eidetic instruction. Where the earlier models you mention have been no more than simulations, for the past month Jonathan has been Beethoven in every sense but the physical – he has been driven by the same drives, his thoughts and behaviour shaped by the same psychological influences, he has been equipped with the same musical vocabulary..."

Mae stopped listening. Eidetics had been in the news just before she had come to the chateau: a controversial, and risky, treatment for severe psychosis. European parliament had recently sanctioned its use for the psychological "readjustment" of the criminally insane.

*Jonathan! What have they done to you?*

Ventori continued, "We are aware of the risks involved – as is Jonathan. Now that his work is complete, he is being deprogrammed – Beethoven is being stood down."



She made herself go and say goodbye. She had watched out for Isabelle Graves' red MG from a second floor window and when it swung through the gates she rushed downstairs. She was breathless by the time she reached the foyer, afraid she had missed him.

She pushed through the door, then stopped.

Jonathan, his wife at his side, was shaking hands with Ventori. As Mae watched, the pain in her heart like a twisting knife, he turned and walked towards the car. She hurried down the steps, stopped only when Ventori seized her roughly by the arm. She turned on him and something in her manner seemed to communicate with the man, as he released her, raised a hand in a placatory gesture.

"Jonathan," she said, so softly that he could easily fail to hear.

He turned and looked at her. His brow creased: his puzzled look. *Is it you I love? she thought. Or is it some other you?*

Or somewhere in between.

"Goodbye, Jonathan," she said.

He smiled, nodded, climbed into the low car. "Goodbye," he said, as if he didn't know her, or was it just an act?



Mae Chang finished the piece in a daze of emotion, the first time she had played it in public. She stood, rocked by the volume of applause, and for once she did not feel the urge to flee. She bowed, tears blurring her vision of the audience, accepted the bouquet from another identikit girl. Then more flowers started to land all around her, raining down from the massed crowd.

The story of the new Beethoven had become public knowledge in November, just before the release of Mae's recording. But no one knew the real story behind the headlines.

She hadn't seen him since that last day at the Chateau d'Arquet. Her only contact with him had been a handwritten note passed to her through Anton: *You played "Appassionata" to me, I believe. I have decided to call this one, simply, "Passion." Yours, Jonathan.*

Mae left the stage. Anton hurried her to the dressing room. She collapsed into a chair before the mirror,



Anton smiling at her from the door.

"If you don't mind, Anton - I want to be alone."

His smile widened. "I've heard from him," he said.

Mae felt her heart thumping. "From Jonathan?"

"He's going to do it again in the New Year: he's going to the chateau for treatment." Anton waved a piece of paper at her. "I have the contract here, Mae. He wants you to work with him again. He wants you to help him with his tenth symphony..."

She snatched the contract from his fingers, pushed him through the door and sat down heavily. She stared at the print, trying to make sense of it, but it was just so much legalese.

She looked up at her reflection in the mirror. More than anything she wanted to see Jonathan again, renew her affair with the only man she had ever loved.

But how could she return to the chateau? The real Jonathan Graves was a married man, someone she did

not know and had never really met. The man she loved was a mere construct, a psychological simulacrum of someone who had lived 200 years ago - and what kind of love was that?

Mae Chang wondered what to do as she stared into the mirror, her expression blank.



**Keith Brooke & Eric Brown** have, separately, contributed many stories to *Interzone*. The above is their first-ever collaboration, following hard on the heels of two collaborative stories Eric perpetrated with Stephen Baxter (see issues 100 and 107, and see Baxter's article about collaborating with Eric in issue 108).

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Say what you like about the contents, Hodder & Stoughton always used to offer a good-looking book. That tradition has slipped with Eric S. Nylund's *Pawn's Dream*, which is atrociously designed and execrably printed in a lumen face on the cheapest grade of paper. At £16.99 the price is disgraceful. The initial bad impression is reinforced by a truly cringe-making luvvy page, including a reference to "Syne," his copy editor (who could use a refresher on the pluperfect tense); but thereafter things can only improve, and in fact his book deserves much better than it got.

The basic premise is that of L. Ron Hubbard's *Slaves of Sleep*. Roland Pritchard lives, in our world, a humdrum life with a dead-end job and the endless torment of looking after his mad, alcoholic mother; but in sleep he is a scholarly acolyte in an abbey on the Sword-&-Sorcery world of Meredin. As the story opens his two selves have little feeling for each other, since neither remembers his "dreams" all that well; but that changes when he is sought out, simultaneously in both lives, by others of the self-styled royal families who possess the same (genetically determined) ability to live in two worlds, plus the sorcerous powers that go therewith. His own sorcerous potential burgeons rapidly in response to the threats on his life as he becomes embroiled in two parallel intrigues, made the more fraught because his new friends in one world may well be allied to his new enemies in the other, both lots being quite as treacherous and even more quarrelsome than the royalty of Amber.

The dualistic magic employed (loosely based on the Chinese tradition) reflects the book's structure, the central character is carefully and attractively visualized and the pace is well sustained – as is the tension deriving from the mounting mystery of who is truly on each side, and Roland's increasing sexual involvement with two women whom he first meets in different worlds, and who both have magical powers far in advance of his own. When it comes the revelation is highly satisfactory in terms of the informing metaphysic and the various magical heirlooms over which the families squabble, the struggle for which dominates the action.

That is well enough, but Nylund no more than Hubbard makes any effort to render the central premise believable, though it's a premise against which one instinctively recoils. Very few of us enjoy the blocks of unbroken sleep necessary to the action, but all right – that may be a family characteristic. Yet how does one get born? If you exist in both worlds, you need a mother in both, who may be the same

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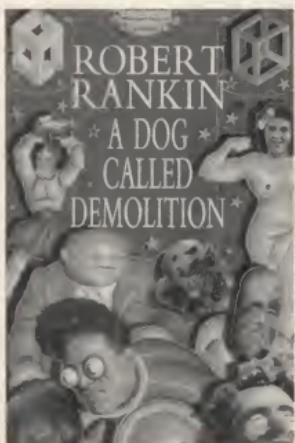
# Another Slave of Sleep

Chris Gilmore

person, but if (as in Roland's case) you're royal on only your father's side, who was your mother over there? Were you a foundling, spontaneously generated? And born asleep? If you're under sedation in one world, do you suffer insomnia in the other?

I don't mind the idea not being new, but writer should build on his borrowings; this one offers great scope for ingenuity, but has been treated as a mere plot mechanism. Nylund's potential is obvious, but not yet fully realized; I hope for more and better later, but meanwhile... wait for the paperback.

New ideas have never been Robert Rankin's main strength; his reputation rests on the ingeniously disrespectful treatment of old ones. His recent form has been good (see *Interzone* 103), and he's at it again in *A*



**Dog Called Demolition** (Doubleday, £15.99) which extends his range but not past recognition. He has always been a skit-maker and a piss-taker (try saying that when you're in a condition much favoured by his characters), and this time his targets are: for the skit, the story of people being mentally controlled by incorporeal entities (as in Jack Vance's *The Brains of Earth*); and for the piss, the whole concept of post-modernism.

For the sake of familiarity it's set in Brentford, and some characters from his other Brentford books get walk-on parts; Danny Orion (no relation to anyone called Danny O'Ryan), the central viewpoint, is the usual young Brentonian lay-about; and many of the jokes (including his *oeuvre*-running gag about old charters) are old friends as well – not that it matters, as Rankin presents his chestnuts with all his customary aplomb and in any case has several new ones, including a novel but logical use for a canned-laughter machine.

As in Vance's novella (which should ideally be read first) the problem is, how do you convince all the people harbouring their mind-parasites that they'd better off without them, when those same parasites are constantly demanding that they turn and rend you? Moreover, Danny has recently been host to a particularly vicious sub-species, the dog of the title, which has impelled him to commit a series of gruesome murders. The local comic policemen viewing the scenes of crime reach a new high in black farce (or from another standpoint new depths of bad taste) even for Rankin.

"It's a sort of Maze," said Constable Dreadlock. "The small intestines have been stretched and laid out on the carpet. The inspector's trying to work out how you get to the head in the middle."

The story is even more liberally peppered with embedded anecdotes than usual, but this time Rankin (and here the post-modernism comes in) inserts his personal commentary on three levels, of which the most obvious is a sprinkling of footnotes. More elliptically, many of the chapters are decorated with nonsense verses in a quasi-late-Victorian style. These vary considerably in quality, but the best stand comparison with Lewis Carroll in the same vein:

*Pardon my lines, Ben Andrews.  
Pardon my way of speech.  
My range of old suitcases,  
My love of lurid braces,  
My fear of foreign places,  
And my hatred of the beach.*

(Note: as a matter of fact I've improved this stanza a teeny bit for

the benefit of those who will wish to get it by heart.)

Finally (and to me quite incomprehensibly) the book has a "soundtrack." There are 26 chapters, and Rankin provides a list of 24 tracks to be played "LOUD. THERE'S NO OTHER WAY" while reading it, which two chapters demand silence being left to the reader's judgement. My pet whale and music-consultant informs me that there really were at one time people with names like Jimi Hendrix and Frank Zappa, and that others listed only did sing songs called "Gary Gilmore's Eyes" and "Insane in the Membrane." She adds that Rankin is right about not playing them soft, and that I probably wouldn't like them. Ah! my musical taste ranges from Vivaldi to Villa-Lobos, which I would have thought eclectic enough for anyone, but I enjoyed this book thoroughly and in silence.

Whether I'll be enjoying many more is less certain. Rankin chose this approach, and after post-modernism, can there be any forgiveness? It's difficult to envision any extension on the same lines which would avoid total chaos, yet a return to his usual style would risk anti-climax. I therefore wonder if this signals Rankin's decision to try an entirely new approach next time, and await his next with more than usual interest.

Those who prefer their post-modernism straight (insofar as that's not a contradiction) need look no further than *D'Alembert's Principle* by Andrew Crumey (Dedalus, £7.99) with an introduction by John Clute (very much in the style of a Clute Review).

It's evidently linked to his *Pfitz* of 1995, and early indications are that Crumey intends to produce a series somewhat in the manner (and possibly at the length) of Cabell's 27-volume *Life of Manuel*. If so, it's a bit soon to specify the mood, structure and philosophical content of the whole, but on the evidence before me it would seem that the part of Horvendile is taken by Pfitz, the beggar and archetypally unreliable witness; the philosophical musings are concerned mainly with the problems of free will, chance and necessity; the apostle of order and determinism is D'Alembert, while the principles of chance and chaos are represented by Magnus Ferguson, an "amateur" who lays siege to the Encyclopedia with his papers on probability; and the



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ornamentation will be as richly dependent on quotations from bogus and genuine sources as was ever the case with Cabell.

Jean le Rond D'Alembert was a mathematician of the 18th century who collaborated with Diderot on the French Encyclopedia and whose "principle" derives from the application of Newton's third law to the dynamics of closed systems. One feels that had he lived a century or two later he might have discovered, respectively, the second law of thermodynamics or Ashby's Law. Crumey is not, therefore, taking unconscionable liberties with his life by assuming that he was looking for what would now be called a Theory of Everything. The point of such a theory is that its correct application would automatically fill all lacunae in knowledge, as hypotheses need only be checked for consistency with it, and D'Alembert feels that it is only by proving such a theory that he can make sense of his own life. For he was a bastard, abandoned for a foundling on a church step by his mother, and far more likely to have died of exposure than to be found and nurtured by a pious lady returning from prayer.

The present volume is in three parts, of which the first is the longest and most conventional. The ageing D'Alembert is writing his autobiography (something he did in real life, though in the third person), and considering the betrayals (if such they were) that he suffered at the hands of his mother and the (entirely platonic) love of his life. While he is away from his desk his housemaid reads his MS, and relates it as far as she can to her own circumstances. At his death his antagonist arrives with an MS of his own, entitled *The Cosmography*, which is the second part of the book.

It's the part I found least satisfactory, as it consists of ingenious but verbose allegorical approaches to an extremely stark problem in metaphysics, viz:

If you assume a single universe, running mechanically from a set beginning to a set end, then all intervening events must be predetermined. In that case

free will is an illusion, for there can be no will where there is no choice of action, and in such a universe there is not only no such choice, but no action in any meaningful sense – only pre-determined motion.

Yet if there is a multiplicity of universes, a new one springing into being with each quantum fluctuation, then there is once again no free will; for when all options are taken up, none remain open. What we perceive as our pasts and our futures are nothing but arbitrarily chosen steps on a random walk through a five-dimensional matrix where everything which could happen always did, and everything which can happen always will.

You take this sort of thing seriously or not at all, and the same applies to both his ground plan for a relational language, in which the distinction between subject and predicate is obliterated, and his scheme for providing every person, actual or potential, living or dead, with a unique number which specifies that person's precise relationship to Adam and Eve.

This last figures in the third part, where the jeweller Goldmann (a Jurgen figure if ever I saw one) is arrested along with Pfitz with whom he is apparently (but appearances are often deceptive) about to commit an unnatural act in an alley. To pass the time he listens to Pfitz's stories, and is shocked by their amorality. That they are highly unlikely is less comfort than it should be, as Pfitz not only doesn't care if they are true or not, but may be lying when he says they aren't.

Clute says that "it is not exactly fair" to call this book a novel, and while I agree, that leaves open the question of what to call it. "A novella and two unclassifiables, all contributing to what may one day be an impressive whole," would be my guess – so get in early and read it.

After such rarefied mirth *a jeu d'esprit* is all the more welcome. Diana Wynne Jones's *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* is based on a simple but original conceit: suppose that the innumerable sword-and-sorcery trilogies are, in fact, tour brochures; you pay your money and set forth on a prolonged adventure holiday (whether on an elaborate stage-set or in virtual reality is unimportant) much as described in *Dream Park* and its sequels (or as arranged for his own benefit by Kickaha in Philip José Farmer's *World of Tiers* sequence, though with less variety). The book before you is a crib, offering guidance and reassurance.

As such tours don't (yet) exist, the subtext is a complex joke against the clichés of S&S plotting and vocabulary, and can be approached in several ways. I've a horrid feeling that

certain aspiring writers will regard the formulae as a sure-fire road to riches, and mine will be the grisly task of reviewing their endeavours – if so, expect unprecedented savagery in a year or three. Others may be put off entirely, which if their will is that weak may be no bad thing.

Wynne Jones has evidently read widely, and the book is based on her observations of bad practice and common practice. The genre being heavily stylized, and bad practice being as rampant in S&S as anywhere else, the two overlap considerably; moreover, she maintains an even, non-judgemental style throughout, so that the reader is left to conclude for himself as to where generic conventions give way to cliché.

But we're left in no doubt about the literary clichés. Wynne Jones has a fine ear, and all the worst fustian is collected and italicized as "official management terms." If these had simply been presented as a list it would be worth the price, but unfortunately the rest of the book doesn't meet the same standards. It's not organized thematically, as one would expect, but as a simple alphabetical list. I can see no reason for doing it that way, which must have been almost as difficult as a proper job, and not only ensures that such vital concepts as "vestigial empire" and "wizards" aren't defined until far too late, but results in much of the information being duplicated – and in close proximity. This is particularly deplorable when the information takes the form of jokes. I suppose it was her editor's idea ... but I'm tired of railing at semi-literate, tin-eared editors. This one at least knows the

**War of the Worlds: Global Dispatches** edited by Kevin J. Anderson (Bantam, \$22.95) is an anthology of (mostly) new stories set in the universe of H.G. Wells's classic novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Wells imagined high-technology invaders from a Lowellian dying-desert Mars. They land in southern England and obliterate human civilization before proceeding, vampire-like, to feed on the blood of humans kept as cattle – until they are felled, fortuitously, by Earth bacterial infections.

*WOTW* remains, of course, one of the seminal works of science fiction. Even though Lowell's Mars has gone, Wells's central theme of alien invasion, told and retold, has fascinated and appalled us in the century since publication. On first publication the myth drew its power from the puncturing of imperialist complacency; later it mined new seams of Cold War paranoia.

The theme of this new anthology expands on Wells's central notion. Earth at the turn of the century was after all a big, complex place, full of

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alphabet, and doubtless takes proper pride. The following entry is typical:

Princesses come in two main kinds:

1 Wimps.

2 Spirited and wilful. A spirited princess will be detectable by the scattering of freckles across the bridge of her somewhat upturned nose<sup>(OMG)</sup>. Spirited princesses often disguise themselves as boys and invariably marry commoners of sterling worth. With surprising frequency these commoners turn out to be long-lost heirs to Kingdoms (see PRINCES).

And to round off, Garry Kilworth's *Cybercats* (Bantam, £3.50) is a juvenile, though I'm unsure about the target age-range. The publishers use the coy euphemism "young adults," but who's kidding whom? It's set in a polluted, over-populated world physically reminiscent of Brian Aldiss's *Earthworks*, though the moral atmosphere is pure DC comics. The child/adult relationships are wholesome past belief, and the principal

villain is known to the police no less than the public as Mouseman.

The streetwise youthful protagonists, Hotwire and Blindboy, conceive the useful idea of a robot cat to eat the heaped garbage which is such an unwelcome feature of their lives, reducing it to "odourless gas" (carbon dioxide, methane and water vapour at a guess, and damn the greenhouse effect). OK, but the evil Mouseman, having escaped from jail, proposes to wire up the cats with radio-controlled explosive, whereupon he will threaten to detonate the lot if his demands are not met. To this end he and his

cohorts kidnap Hotwire and Blindboy, they being good at computers, and the game's afoot.

All right, but who, of what age, is expected to take it seriously? For the dim-witted DC comics already exist, with picture panels and no joined-up writing, while to the brighter sprogs of this corrupt age it will surely seem a material omission that none of the bad guys who kidnap pretty, pre?-adolescent Hotwire ever gets round to threatening her with rape. In other words, Kilworth has come up with the sort of book that uniterary adults assume children must like by divine, childish fiat. They won't, because of its lack of bite. Hotwire? More Goody Two-wires-short-of-a-circuit, I think. Get 'em a Heinlein if they're bright, a comic if they're dim.

Chris Gilmore

## The Blight of the Cooters

Stephen Baxter

cultural and military conflict. What effect would the Martian invasion have in other parts of the world – America, China, India...? So the anthology consists of "dispatches" by various historical and/or fictional characters from around the globe, detailing their different perspectives on the Martian incursion. (Thus Wells's core idea is inflated into something comparable to Harry Turtledove's recent, and successful, *Worldwar* series, which shows World War II being interrupted by an alien invasion.) It's a neat concept, and Anderson describes how he was "stopped dead in my tracks on a hiking trail... with the sudden idea for this book."

Well, I know the feeling; other people's ideas sometimes hit me like that too. For, of course, regarding *par-WOTW*, Howard Waldrop has long since been there, done that, bought the T-shirt – in 1987, in fact, with his famous story "Night of the Cooters." And that's the problem with the anthology.

"Cooters" is reprinted once more here, and it is – and not surprisingly, given it is the only piece based on genuine inspiration – the freshest of the bunch. Unfortunate Martians land in Texas and come up against a no-nonsense Sheriff ("you mean to tell me Mars is attacking London, England and Pachuco County, Texas?... Get a hold of Skip Whitworth and have him bring out The Gun..."). "Cooters" is a poised and very funny story which shows the strengths and limitations of the anthology's central idea. The elements of the Wells scenario are, after all, very familiar: the cylinders, the tripods, the black smoke, the red weed, the bacteria... Waldrop knew this and structured his prose around the assumption that we would know

what he's talking about. And he derives his humour from the fact that actually, Wells's Martians weren't so difficult to knock over – even with 1898 technology – as long as you don't take them too seriously.

So we actually have a limited, and unoriginal, premise behind this collection. Given that Waldrop got there first, what else is there to say?

It is a fault of authors slumming it as reviewers, or editors, that one tends to look at others' work not in the spirit of analysis but of synthesis: not "how has this been done?" but "how would I have done it if it was my idea?" But perhaps in this case this is a valid perception, because it gives us clues as to how this collection might better have succeeded. To go beyond Waldrop, one must also go beyond Wells. One must offer a genuine story, a new perception; it isn't enough simply to footnote, to show us the old stuff again through new eyes.

After my own *Time Machine* sequel, *The Time Ships*, I had vague plans for further Wellsian follow-ups. My *WOTW II* would have seen huge von Braun rocket ships carrying British Empire troops in a return invasion of the sands of Mars... (but then I found Garrett P. Serviss had been there before, with the terrifically titled *Edison's Conquest of Mars*, first serialized in 1898). Christopher Priest, in *The Space Machine* (1976), took us to Wells's Mars itself, and conflated other Wellsian fiction elements besides. You can go as far as you like; the possibilities – the opportunities – are endless. How about a story from the point of view of a Martian? [Kim Newman did just that, in "Famous Monsters" – Ed.] What if Wells's protagonists' interpretation of the events of *WOTW* – the invasion hypothesis – was false? Could the invasion have another meaning?

In any event, to surpass Waldrop, one must go beyond the limits of Wells's original, in one direction or another. And too few of the stories here succeed. Some of the more successful pieces follow Waldrop in poking gentle, period-flavour fun at Wells. Mike Resnick's entertaining Theodore Roosevelt dispatch, for instance, with its closing hint that cross-species bacterial infections can work both ways, actually extends the Wellsian frame. Likewise "Paris Conquers All" by Greg Benford and David Brin couples a hard-sf notion of how 1890s engineers could have combatted the invasion ("Loose the hounds of electrodynamics!" cries Jules Verne) with an exuberantly funny image of Martian war machines ardently scaling the Eiffel Tower.

Thus, the triumph of humour and imagination. The weakest of the pieces here lack one, the other, or both. The bottom of the humour bar-

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rel is Connie Willis's irritating smartass joke. Kevin Anderson's own contribution, on the perspective of Lowell himself, is little more than a clumsy reworking of elements of Lowell's biography, and its conclusion is a surprise to no one but Lowell. Anderson's sometime collaborator Doug Beason offers us a silly tale of a teenage action-hero Albert Einstein. Dan Marcus is a new author whose contribution here – Pablo Picasso watching the Martians devastate Paris's tourist attractions – seems characteristic of what I've seen of his work. The piece has a certain gloomy grandeur but isn't actually a story, in that there is no real plot development or character growth, and some laziness needs editing out ("Pablo, you are such an asshole sometimes..."). Still, Marcus may be one to watch.

Some contributions fall into other fairly obvious holes. My knowledge of 1898 biographies is less than encyclopedic, and so the stories of, for example, Joseph Pulitzer (Allen Steele), Winston Churchill in H. Rider Haggard's Africa (Janet Berliner) – even, I'm ashamed to say, Tolstoy (Mark W. Tiedemann) – meant little to me. Meanwhile, some authors take it on themselves to lay bare the moral of Wells's fable. Thus M. Shayne Bell's Joseph Conrad, and Barbara Hambly's Kipling Brits-in-India contribution: "Havin' seen the Martians turnin' our world into a sort of copy of their own... and huntin' us and usin' us... I can't say I agree with the partisans, but I do understand 'em a bit better, sorr..." We get the point, guys. We get it. We got it 98 years ago!

Still, the best of the pieces here do extend the Wells/Waldrop parameters – but in tantalizing fragments. George Alec Effinger has the invasion mounted from Burroughs's Barsoom. Benford and Brin's brief "Afterword" hints at a reverse expedition of "interplanetary argonauts" launched in 1928 from Earth's own Great Cannons. (But B&B's elderly Verne is perhaps a little earnest in his wish for interplanetary reconciliation. We would all enjoy a bloody good fight first!) Dave Wolverton's fine Jack London trappers-in-Alaska yarn cleverly points out that the Martians would have been better suited to survival at our poles than in the more temperate climes. So the Martians build a huge new city at Anchorage,

which walks off to the north and disappears... Wolverton offers us a new perspective of a Martian – trapped, in this story, in a dogfight – as a creature of a vast but different intelligence. Likewise the Mark Twain piece, by Daniel Keys Moran and Jodi Moran, offers us Twain's own vast and cool and unsympathetic perception of the ultimate helplessness of the Martians in the face of man's cruelty.

Robert Silverberg's story of Henry James and Wells during the invasion is a little light on original plot, but it does offer a new perspective on the Martians – and Wells: "Where has [Wells's] scientific objectivity gone? For my part I am altogether fascinated..." This is well researched and smoothly told and yet, I feel, disappointing. For example a climactic scene of Wells and James in a deserted British Museum offered resonances of the Time Traveller's remote-future Palace of Green Porcelain, resonances of which Silverberg is unaware, or chooses to ignore.

Walter Jon Williams's "Foreign Devils" is perhaps the finest piece here, with its tale of a Martian invasion of dynastic China. That country, with its immense spaces and human resources, was perhaps the best equipped to soak up and recover from the interplanetary attack, and the story closes with hints of an altered future, in which the Foreign Devils of the title are too preoccupied with their own affairs to resist the emergence of a new Middle Kingdom...

And perhaps the most imaginative piece in the book is Don Webb's "To Mars and Providence," featuring the eight-year-old H. P. Lovecraft, who enters what appears to be telepathic contact with a Martian, and so encounters a startling, original – and Lovecraftian – new backstory to the invasion.

Thus, what might have been. Perhaps with some tough editing this collection could have become a classic. But you get the impression, frankly, that nobody cared enough; even at a superficial level – tying up dates and places across the stories – the editorial hand is absent. And the supra-Wellsian, post-Waldrop elements which are present are too sparse to float the bulk of the anthology off the rocks.

As David Pringle pointed out in *IZ* 107, such a book as this can be published with impunity in the US because of differences in copyright laws. Here in the UK – like it or not – approval for publication would have to be negotiated with the estate of H. G. Wells. *Global Dispatches* does not, I think, serve as a fitting homage to Wells; any endorsement for publication by the Wells estate would surely be based on commercial considerations alone. And on the whole, Anderson should have left it to Waldrop, who said it all better anyhow.

Stephen Baxter

When a new novel – and a new author – comes resplendent with cover blurbs from the likes of James Morrow, Michael Bishop and Lisa Goldstein, one could be reasonably optimistic that the story inside is a little bit out of the ordinary. Patrick O'Leary's *Door Number Three* (Tor, \$23.95) does not fail to live up to the hype – in fact, if anything, it makes those aforementioned blurbs seem like the undersell of the year.

One day, an attractive young woman strolls into the office of therapist John Donnelly and tells him a story. She says she has been left on Earth by an alien race called the Horlock and if, in the space of one year, she can convince one person of her story – and she has chosen him – she will be permitted to stay. Then she calmly unfastens her blouse and displays her breasts: she has square nipples.

And so begins a story that is colossal in scope and audacious in style, encompassing alien abduction, time travel, psychotherapy, talking birds and the end of the world... though not necessarily in that order. O'Leary's story shifts with dizzying speed but, like the greatest of virtual-reality fairground rides, the reader has no choice but to hold on and simply marvel at the latest revelation, quietly confident that just a few pages further on it will be rendered redundant.

"If all this sounds disjointed, I apologize," the narrator tells us at the beginning of Chapter Seven. "My thoughts bounce a lot. My memories, too."

But yet the book has a startling fluidity, the same kind that marked Joseph Heller's rollercoaster *Catch-22* and Kurt Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan* and *Slaughterhouse 5*, steadfastly refusing to treat time as a chronological constant but rather manipulating it so that events are detailed in an order suggested by their influences and their dependencies.

But it's more than even that.

Here we have the contemporary Americana and family relationships of Richard Ford and Anne Tyler; the acerbic humour of Philip Roth and John Irving; the surreal yet chillingly plausible invention of Philip K. Dick and Stanislaw Lem... and maybe just a little of Robert Pirsig's metaphysical posturing.

O'Leary moves with considerable panache from a hospital room, where the hapless "hero" bids farewell to his dying mother, to another reality in which he appears as a dream image to a race depending on his own seed for its continued existence. In between, he covers other settings, other times and other considerations, taking the reader through every conceivable emotion until the final of many truths is revealed and confronted. *Door Number Three* is a marvellous book... a staggering concept richly realized.



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## Behind the Door

Peter Crowther

A novel featuring child-abduction as the core of its story might initially be regarded as nothing less than topical... if a little ghoulish and opportunistic. But, rather than simply dwelling on the inevitably grisly side of this modern-day blight on Society, David B. Silva's *The Disappeared* (Headline, £5.99) adopts a completely different approach, and one that is equally distressing.

For 10 years, Teri Knight has been coming to terms with the disappearance of her son, Gabriel, who simply went off to the park on his bike and didn't return. The intervening years – a dizzying stream of sleepless nights and empty days – have not been kind and the pressures have led to Teri and her husband Michael splitting up. Then, one evening, a young woman comes to the house and returns Teri's son to her... only the boy has not aged a single day. "I think he's missed you," the woman says before disappearing into the night.

Initially unable to come to terms with what has happened – and, understandably, concerned that she's losing her mind – Teri holds back from questioning her son. Gabriel, however, has no such compunctions, particularly when it comes to wanting to know where his father is. But the boy's mother is saved from answering by a second knock on the door... this one destined to plunge her and her son – and former Juvenile Investigations Bureau Lieutenant Walter Travis, who worked on the original case – into a maelstrom of deceit, murder, quasi-government cover-ups, horrifying experimentation and escalating concerns for the weakening boy.

A little too long for its own good and occasionally somewhat contrived – particularly in terms of the characterizations of and conversational exchanges between the nefarious government types – *The Disappeared* is unlikely to make anyone's shortlist for the various genre awards for 1995 (when the

book was first published in hardcover) although one suspects that part of that decision may be attributed to a marked lack of gristle and gore. But it would be a shame for the novel to be overlooked completely.

Where *The Disappeared* does score, and score highly, is in its intelligent and wholly believable depiction of real people trying to come to terms with a truly unimaginable situation – first the disappearance of a child (with all of its attendant fears) and secondly with the realization that the returned boy (the manner of whose re-appearance is, in itself, grounds for grave concerns) is blighted by some incurable and bizarre ailment.

Silva skilfully avoids either of the obvious cop-out finales – a bangs-and-whistles confrontation or a downbeat dirge – and opts for a middle ground of cautious optimism. Mark Morris, one of our homespun heroes in this furrow of the literary field, has repeatedly cited the confrontational aspects of the horror genre as the truest mark of a book's strength and its intrinsic success. In this respect alone, it's an excellent piece of work; on purely entertainment terms, it's a damned good read.

A short-story collection is the least profitable branch of the writing game for everyone concerned... for everyone, that is, except the reader. There can be few reading experiences so completely satisfying than a series of well-constructed tales, tightly told, but the single-author collection (or anthology, for that matter) is an increasingly rare beast... almost an endangered species, in fact. And this is because, we are told, the financial returns are minimal.

The whys and wherefores for this sorry state of affairs are academic, with blame (if one can call it that...) being due in almost equal part to publishers (some for turning down such proposals and others for failing to promote the finished result), household-name chain stores who are strangling the distribution and whose order-pads mean life or death for virtually any book these days... and, sad to say, to the many potential punters out there in the horror/dark fantasy field who merely require a new doorstep-sized tome to deliver their daily dose of blood-spatted and gore-soaked contrivance.

Thus it's pleasing to come across a new author and a new outlet, both of whom are prepared to take a chance and put their reputations (and bank balances!) on the line with a collection... the case in point, as Rod Serling would surely have said, is *Midnight Promises*, a collection of 16 stories written by Richard T. Chizmar and published by Gauntlet Publications (Deluxe hardcover edition, \$35; no price or details given for a regular trade edition).

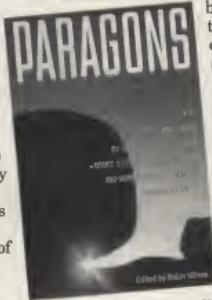
Chizmar is the editor of the US magazine *Cemetery Dance*, and Gauntlet Publications is the brainchild of Barry Hoffman, head honcho of the semi-regular (annual?) *Gauntlet* magazine-book which explores the limits of censorship in modern society. Their first collaborative endeavour – their second, if you count "Only the Strong Survive," one of the short stories collected here, which they wrote together – is a formidable achievement.

Kicking off with the hard-boiled "A Season of Change," with its homage to Elmore Leonard and *The Usual Suspects*, these stories move into semi-familiar territories but always by means of a hitherto unexplored route. A son who contrives a special gift for

Robin Scott Wilson, editor of *Paragons* (St Martin's Press, \$24.95), is a teacher of sf as well as a writer, one of the founders of the Clarion writers' workshops. So this is not just an anthology but a didactic work, revisiting the format of his previous anthology, *Those Who Can*. The stories are chosen to illustrate literary terms – plot, character, setting, theme, point-of-view, style – and each is accompanied by a short essay from its author. The introductions and essays are all interesting (whether they will help anyone write well I can't tell), but this is also an excellent anthology.

The first story is "The Price of Oranges" by Nancy Kress (used to illustrate plot): this is the one about the man who goes back in time to get a decent Jewish boyfriend for his daughter, and succeeds in a way he couldn't have imagined. James Patrick Kelly's "Monsters" (also plot) is the one about the ... well, I can't tell you without giving the game away. Howard Waldrop's "Fair Game" (style) is an exuberantly pastoral black joke set in the interval between a trigger being pulled and the shot being fired. Joe Haldeman's "Feedback" tells of an artist who sells his services as a "facilitator" using a direct brain-link to enable his customers to paint the picture they would have painted if they had the ability. He learns more than he wants to.

The other stories are all more than averagely good. Greg Bear's "Sisters" (character) tells us about a normal girl growing up in a world of genetically engineered beauties; Bruce Sterling's "Our Neural Chernobyl" is supposedly a review of a 2056 book about gene-hacking. There is other good stuff by Pat Murphy, Kim Stanley Robinson, Karen Joy Fowler, John Kessel and Pat Cadigan.



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his dying father... but at what price? ("Heroes"); a young boy recently moved to the White House who comes up with a special (if extreme) way to get sent back to the small-town home he yearns for ("Homesick"); a department-store Santa Claus who befriends a young

## Paragons

Ken Brown

There isn't one bad story here.

The book also includes a version of Bruce Sterling's "Workshop Lexicon," which originally appeared in *Interzone*. So if you want to know what a Tom Swift, an Infodump or a Squid in the Mouth are, and you haven't kept all your old issues of the magazine, buy this book even if you don't want to read one of the most interesting sf anthologies for years. I hope that it's published in the UK.

**The Trokeville Way** by Russell Hoban (Cape, £10.99) and *Firefly Dreams* by Jenny Jones (Point Fantasy, £3.99) are both novels directed towards older children or teenagers

*The Trokeville Way* is a short, odd book. Thirteen-year-old Nick loses a fight with a bully, meets a busker called Moe Nagic and buys a strange picture from him. Later he falls into a "mind trip," a sort of shared dream,

with the bully, the girl they both fancy, a number of other teenagers, the younger selves of some of their parents and some memories of the dead – all trapped in the simple world of the picture, forced to replay some earlier events in Moe Nagic's life. Before they can return to the real world Nick has to face up to all the usual things that you have to face up to in these "coming of age" stories thought appropriate for young adults. Later he wakes up in hospital.

*Firefly Dreams* is set in a typical fantasy world. Fifteen-year-old twins Laura and Darius, run away from home to visit their city cousins in Bricus, a state divided between two

girl and decides to grant her Christmas wish ("The Season of Giving"); a would-be stud whose home-video recordings of his conquests show slightly more than he recalls actually having happened ("Grand Finale"); and, in "The Silence of Sorrow" and "Midnight Promises," two tales of almost unbearable loss and unimaginable bravery.

The late Robert Bloch called Chizmar "a master delineator of two phenomena – the human condition and the inhuman condition." And that says it all. With more collections like this one, maybe the future could look a little brighter for the short-form in our field. It would be nice to think so.

Pete Crowther

magical parties, the (mostly female, mostly good) aquemancers and the (all male, all bad) pyromancers. They don't know that the evil Pyromancer Lerris has taken complete control, and all but two of the aquemancers have escaped into some sort of watery dreamtime, leaving the earthly representation of their soul in drops of water (what else?) kept in bottles (of course).

As soon as they arrive in the city, Darius is pressed into the army, and selected for the Guard (he can stand up straight, he brushes his teeth and he doesn't snore). Laura meets one of her cousins (conveniently amongst the few aquemancers not to have disappeared) and gets involved in the search for the bottles containing the drops of water needed to recall the others. The possibilities of having a couple of homeless beggars trying to examine every single bottle in a large city are not explored in any depth before the escaped Countess is captured and there is a magical showdown in a giant greenhouse.

As I think I've said before in these pages, I've never really seen the point in novels specially written for "older children" or "young adults." Are they meant to draw teenagers into reading by providing them with protagonists of their own age that they can identify with? Or are they meant to protect them from what goes on in adult books by providing them with toned-down sex and violence? Or are they meant to educate, to let the "young adults" know that other people have their problems? Or are they meant to reassure parents that their children are reading books suitable for their age (whatever that means)?

It's not always obvious what age these books are intended for. *The Trokeville Way* seems to be didactically meant for early teens. *Firefly Dreams* is, I guess, targeted at much younger children – although I'd have thought the passages about dreams and death would have been more likely to disturb children than any amount of sexual content. And I do

wish Jenny Jones hadn't called her water-witch "Wincy."

Julian May's *Magnificat* (Knopf, \$24; Voyager, £15.99) is the sequel to *Jack the Bodiless* and *Diamond Mask*, the third and last volume of the "Galactic Milieu" trilogy, itself the prequel to the "Saga of the Exiles" – the action of which, in a sense, takes place between the last-but-one and last pages of this.

There is little to surprise long-time readers here. The general style, and the cast of characters, are much the same as in the earlier books. Almost all the plot has been telegraphed ahead, described in flashback in the "Saga of the Exiles" over ten years ago. The trilogy follows the career of elderly, possibly immortal, bookseller, sf fan, telepath and drunkard Rogati Remillard, "Uncle Rogi," through his memoirs written at the beginning of the 22nd century. He describes the lives of his many grand-nieces and grand-nephews, who are amongst the rich and the powerful of the Galactic Milieu, an alliance of six alien species, which humans were permitted – or forced – to join in the Great Intervention of 2013; and sets the stage for the Metapsychic Rebellion, in which his grand-nephew Marc Remillard and others violently reject the Milieu's promise of "coadunation," a sort of mystical telepathic union under God.

Rogi reveals his own part in various events, supposedly unknown to history. He himself is not sure whether he possesses immense powers that are only available in moments of great danger; or he is continually being helped by his Lylmik mentor "Atoning Unifex" (who, as we have known since the first volume, is a time-travelling future self of Marc); or if he is just incredibly lucky when pissed – which he usually is in moments of stress or danger. As he tells us more than once, he's not a real alcoholic, he can give it up at any time, he just likes to drink a lot. And as he never grows old or sick, why not?

In this third volume, Marc Remillard builds stronger and stronger amplifiers for his psi powers; Rogi goes drinking with poets and hacks of writers; Jack and Dorothy get married and rule the planet Caledonia (Rogi gives them early editions of Franz Werfel's *Star of the Unborn* and Curt Siodmak's *Donovan's Brain* as a wedding present), and various other members of the family spend their time in political and sexual intrigue.

Marc and Rogi both have a number of narrow escapes from the Hydra, a collective mental parasite made up of other members of their family. In the oddest of these Rogi goes fishing with a belly-boat and his intended victim almost has a terrible revenge on him. Either Americans use the word "trout"

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to mean something *much* bigger than we British do or else Julian May is being *very* silly. Perhaps the latter – the whole episode is a lot like a tall story about an angler and a loon that comes from her home state of Washington.

Fury, the evil genius who governs the Hydra, becomes more and more desperate and extreme as his servants are killed one by one – there are a lot of gory killings with sexual overtones. The only possible surprise is when we find out who Fury is – or rather who Fury is part of. Apparently someone with multiple personalities and metapsychic powers can be an evil mastermind without knowing it. Even then, his identity is hinted at in the previous book. The gruesome episode of Mental Man, Marc's attempt to breed a race of humans of great metapsychic power in artificial wombs, is described in detail here, and could be taken as a polemic against reproductive engineering and, by extension, against abortion. Foetus uses are definitely human in these books: they think, can be tempted and can even sin.

At the end of the novel, nearly everything is wrapped up. There are a few unresolved problems (I still wonder how the Duat can mate with humans – is there another time-travel event involved?) but the final act of the story, the Rebellion itself, is played out in exactly the way the observant reader of the Saga will have expected. Marc and his fellow rebels take up arms against the Milieu, commit terrible crimes; are defeated by the combined love and prayer of humanity (directed by Jon and Dorothy and Paul who die in the attempt), and are exiled into the far past. This is all dealt with in the last few chapters, in less than 50 pages, which must be one of the most extreme ratios of build-up to climax in fiction.

The "Saga of the Exiles" and the "Milieu Trilogy" are really two long novels, published in parts, perhaps the two longest novels in sf. By the time I got to the Rebellion I had read or re-read something like 3,400 pages. In a way, this cursory treatment is inevitable. The author has already told us the "battles and dates and things" of the Rebellion and, like Milton before her, she seems to find it easier to describe sin than to find words to talk of divine love. There is only so much you can say about a coadunate Unity developing out of a lattice of meta-concerted

love, however many dictionaries you have available – and, to be fair, this difficulty is one of the points of the book. The other Galactics are always trying and failing to describe their vision of the future of the universe to pesky humans, who can't quite see how they can unite into a Cosmic Mind without losing their individuality. And sometimes Julian May does seem to have swallowed a dictionary. The Lylmik Supervisors, disembodied aliens who are guiding the Milieu into Unity are known as Atoning Unifex, Homologous Trend, Asymptotic Essence, Eupathic Impulse and Noetic Concordance.

The whole "Galactic Milieu" series becomes more explicitly Christian as it develops. Although this was always in the background it becomes obvious part-way through *Jack the Bodiless* when Jon's mother uses telepathy to teach him about incarnation and crucifixion while he is still in the womb. There are frequent quotes from the Bible, the characters attend mass at appropriate times – aliens as well, as it turns out that bread and wine are the only foods that are acceptable to all known intelligent species.

But it's a very particular kind of Christianity. Almost all the characters, except a few of the worst villains, subscribe to liberal Roman Catholicism after the style of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit paleontologist poet who taught that the whole of humanity is evolving in a process of Christ-directed cosmogenesis. The various aliens all look on their mental Unity as a necessary stage in the development of the whole universe into unity with God at the Omega Point. May's characters often refer to or quote from Teilhard; and a saying of his, "Love is the only thing that makes things one without destroying them," sets the scene for the book.

Sin is not so much the result of a primeval Fall, as the consequence of a world that is in the process of becoming Godlike, it is inevitable, perhaps even necessary, and there is always the possibility of redemption. The fate of Marc (who is explicitly compared to Satan, called "Abaddon" and the "Angel of the Abyss") is reminiscent of the speculations of the Third-century Origen of Alexandria, who could not accept that "any portion of creation shall be utterly and entirely out of harmony with that final unity and concord" and wrote that fallen angels, and Satan himself, might after aeons of correction and renewal be given another chance of salvation. Julian May doesn't quote Origen, but she does quote Julian of Norwich: "God said: It is necessary that sin should exist but all will be well and all will be well and every manner of things will be well." Which is, in a way, the point of the book.

Ken Brown

I must start by declaring an interest: I contributed 19 entries to the *St James Guide to Fantasy Writers* edited by David Pringle (St James Press, \$90). That out of the way, I open by noting that the word "Guide" has been carefully chosen: this is not an encyclopedia, although it aims to be comprehensive, nor does it claim to be rigorously objective – the articles are signed, and (within sober limits) judgemental. The guidance is therefore personal in character; the reader is told not only what lies between this or that set of covers, but why the contributor liked it (or occasionally didn't). Most of the entries are largely favourable; the contributors were to a great extent self-selected for their specialist knowledge, and who would choose to become expert in a field he found distasteful? There are exceptions, however: an entry of Chris Morgan's opens with the words, "Despite the publication of nine novels, X— is one of the least able of contemporary British fantasy writers," a theme he develops for over two columns of close type, which is more than it sounds – this is a hefty 11" x 8" volume, of more than 700 pages, following the pattern of the *St James Guide to Science Fiction Writers* (which it partly supersedes, as that book gave considerable coverage to pure fantasy).

As a *vade mecum* for enthusiasts it deserves a place in every public library, although many will find its contents a little perverse in emphasis. Each entry begins with brief biographical details plus (for the living) address (where known), and a list of publications. Those lists must have involved some heavy research in many cases, as they cover not only fantasy but anything else that the author is known to have published, even posthumously or for very limited circulation, plus omnibus volumes, plus critical studies, plus location of the MS collection where relevant. In most cases this presents no problem, but when you come to Kipling it adds up to six columns of apparatus against 2½% of text – and his is one of the longer entries. If that strikes you as excessive, Mark Twain's is a little shorter and gets nine columns.

The reason for listing such items as *Mark Twain's Aquarium: The Samuel Clemens Angelfish Correspondence* (1991) is that the book is intended for the mad enthusiast and the research student as well as the general reader – which means every academic library should have one as well. It's reasonable to suppose that few who relish the author entries will have much time for the bibliographies, and *vice versa*, but it is in any case intended as a reference book.

As a last *hors d'oeuvre*, those living writers who could be traced were invited

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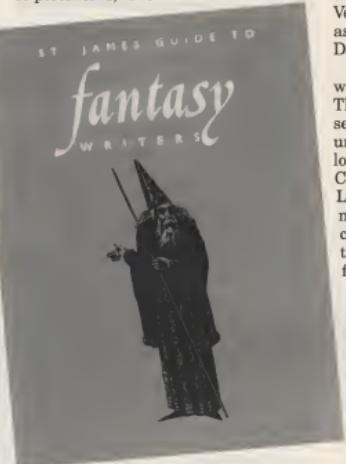


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# Fantasy, from Poland and elsewhere

Chris Gilmore

to tender a few words of apology. Many wisely declined; a few, including Roger Zelazny and Darrell Schweitzer, do it gracefully; most muddle through; some emerge as precious, pompous, defensive or (in Stephen R. Donaldson's case) all three, those of a couple of minor names being over half as long as their actual entries. Robert Irwin is sufficiently aware of the danger to begin with "A statement on my own work would be so portentous," but



it doesn't save him – no one should review himself in public. At least he receives generous praise from Brian Stableford. One unfortunate lady begins, "I write novels as a way of exploring life. Most of my fantasy novels are set in ancient times, well researched..." only to be told by Maureen Speller that her work "is repetitive and heavily reliant on a few well-worn themes and set-

tings which have been more effectively dealt with by other writers. Neither is she well served by a simplistic writing style..."

The entries are written to high minimum standards of style and content, mainly by expert contributors who have read their chosen subjects deeply and by choice. I found a few of them displayed tastes or priorities strikingly unlike my own, but they were coherent, which is the best indicator of honesty – if there's been back-scratching, or even generosity to friends, it must have been very discreet. In this connection, I commend it to publishers; many entries, not least my own on Thomas Burnett Swann, are clutching at their metaphorical sleeves on behalf of this or that half-forgotten writer – "Here is someone good," we tell them, "someone with something individual and valuable to say, who expressed it well. Why not reissue him in A-format, instead of the next literary slobberer who believes that he's the new Tolkien, and that 'it's' is the genitive of 'it'?"

In reviewing books of this kind it's obligatory to carp at omissions, but for the life of me I can only find five worth mentioning: Ian McDonald has written less fantasy than sf, but not that much less, and his stature as a writer is such that I'd have dragged him in on a far weaker pretext; Anthony Burgess should really have been included, despite the mountainous bibliography that would have entailed; R. A. Lafferty and Vernon Lee are unaccountably missing, as is Vladimir Nabokov. Heigh ho, David, thoughts for the second edition?

Another aspect I found slightly odd was the disparity in length of entry. The basic ration is 1½–1½ columns, several small names get one bare column or less, Tolkien gets 2½, but the longest of all (over four) concerns E. Charles Vivian, the runners-up being Lin Carter (whom I would describe as more fan than writer), Michael Moorcock and Christopher Stasheff. If there's a pattern to that, it's too deep for me.

I've always enjoyed tales of pacts with the Devil; they have brought out the very best in writers as diverse as Max Beerbohm, Lord Dunsany, John Collier and Mack Reynolds. I was therefore intrigued to see that they feature strongly in *The Dedalus Book of Polish Fantasy* (Wiesiek Powaga ed. and trans.) brought out by Dedalus at £9.99 (B-format). Except for Slawomir Mrozek the names were all unfamiliar to me, which has obviously been my loss; this book discloses a strong if isolated literary tradition which Powaga has served well, though it could have used a final editorial pass by a mother-tongue English-speaker. A man's genitals may be mutilated or amputated, but hardly massacred, and if

you recast a sentence so that the characters appear in reverse order, you must then translate "former" into "latter."

The pieces span most of the last century and this, and apart from some run-of-the-mill 19th-century gothic and a couple of surrealist and expressionist pieces which now seem dated, the quality is high; the unifying theme of temptation and fall is realized with a bravura variety matched only by the protean forms which the Devil may take. These range from a classic possessor of hysterical virgins (in Jaroslav Iwaszkiewicz's "Mother Joanna of the Angels") through a sinister old hermit (Jan Barszczewski's "The Head Full of Screaming Hair"), a down-at-heel provincial impresario (Kornel Makuszyński's "The Gentleman with the Goatee"), a nondescript drunk (Franciszek Mirandola's "Strange Street"), a scamp in a vulgar red jockey-cap (Mrozek's "Co-existence") a beautiful woman (Wiktor Worozyński's "The White Worms"). Andrzej Szczypiorski's "The Lady with the Medallion") to a large, elderly reptile. This last takes the title role in Andrzej Bursa's "Dragon," which is more obviously an allegory of communism, but as the mystic tradition of Polish catholicism perceives communism as a devilish creation, I'm inclined to follow Powaga and include it.

Curiously, one story where the Devil doesn't appear in person is Marek Huberath's "The Greater Punishment," which is set entirely in Purgatory — prison camp run very sloppily but with a grim, underlying efficiency to match the author's grim, underlying humour. This one is certainly not an allegory of communism — the theology is too serious, and this seriousness, even when the authors engage in savage humour, marks the chief difference between the Polish tradition and those of western Europe and America. One suspects that it stems from Poland's unhappy history under Russian and German oppression, and the humour, especially in "Co-existence" is certainly very like the Jewish in tone, though with a rather broader brush. In other contexts the number of violent deaths among the writers would be extraordinary, but not in Poland.

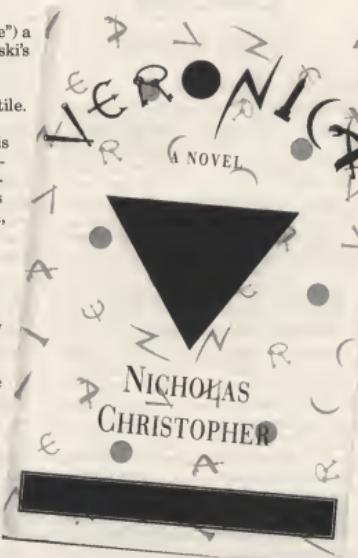
Even without the Devil the standard remains high. Bruno Jasieniński's "The Legs of Isolda Morgan" is a study in creeping insanity that Poe might have been proud of, while Stefan Grabski's "The Grey Room" is reminiscent of M.R. James. By contrast, Witold Gombrowicz's "Dinner at Countess Kotluboy's" is a masterful double satire on snobbery and vegetarianism. The book ends with "The Golden Galley," a story allegedly written when the author,

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Jacek Dukaj, was only 15. It combines space opera with black magic and anti-bureaucratic satire, and reads like nothing I've encountered elsewhere, though I suspect R. A. Lafferty would like it. Not quite worth the price on its own, but this is a fat collection, and excellent value — one to keep.



And for something completely different... Nicholas Christopher's *Veronica* (Bantam, £8.99) harks back to the French symbolists, though it's set in contemporary New York and contains some appropriately violent action. The viewpoint, Leo, encounters Veronica, daughter of the famous illusionist (though very little of his magic was truly illusory) Albin White, and immediately finds himself embroiled in a series of dreams and visions of such realism that he soon has no idea if he's awake at any point, let alone whether any particular incident has actually happened — a confusion worse confounded when ancient documents and contemporary pictures come alive, or accommodate themselves to apparent changes in reality.

There are patterns, however: glasses of vari-coloured liquids, small yellow and blue birds, oranges, mirrors, white gloves — all parts of the stage magician's paraphernalia — keep recurring. There is surely a pattern, and Veronica, a great keeper of literal keys, surely holds the key to it. Moreover, she needs Leo to assist her on a mission. Ten years previously, in the course of an experiment in time-travel, her father disappeared on stage but failed to reappear, and she is convinced that Starwood, his envious rival and former apprentice, sabotaged his act and marooned him in the past. For astrological reasons, Leo is the man to get him back.

The book progresses rather slowly from one gorgeous setting to another, but the lack of pace is more than compensated by Christopher's numerous and imaginative descriptive passages. In particular, his account of Veronica's friend Keko's apartment deserves to be used as a model of visualization. Indeed, he's so good at interiors that I can see him being discounted as an interior-designer *manqué*, but I'm prepared to give him credit — I suspect he'd make a very good interior-designer, should a multi-millionaire choose to commission him. Meanwhile his writing conveys a mood of mounting apprehension as (subject to sundry experiences which may involve travel in time) the one moment when the rescue can be effected draws nigh; for Starwood is aware of what is going on, and determined to thwart Veronica's efforts — preferably by murder. Moreover, it's evident that Veronica is concealing plenty that Leo might well find of interest. Is it from fear of accidental betrayal? Or does she plan to sacrifice him in one of several ways which will occur to the reader? She may be sorry to do it, but family comes first!

Such a heavily telegraphed climax runs a serious risk of anticlimax, but Christopher's, flamboyantly over the top as it is, manages to survive its own build-up. *Veronica* may be precious in places, and makes no claims to be about anything external to itself, but it's put together like a good watch. To write in such a way while avoiding the bathetic requires extraordinary control of mood and a rare understanding of the language; it's the more curious, therefore, that Christopher commits and repeats a couple of solecisms, damaging the atmosphere of this otherwise highly accomplished book on several occasions. For his information, therefore: the preterite of the verb to slink is slunk — there is no such word as "slinked"; and in a highly-charged context, it's as well not to refer to your little finger as your "pinky".

Chris Gilmore

Isaac Asimov's Third Law of Reviewers states: "A reviewer must read with detachment and not allow his judgement of the book to be twisted by his judgement of the writer... he must concentrate on the book and only the book." To ignore the 50-year career that underpins the two final story collections of Isaac Asimov would not be giving the Good Doctor his due...

**Gold** (HarperCollins, £14.99) is a collection of Asimov's last 15 science-fiction stories, about half the book, together with 38 non-fiction pieces relating to science fiction. Two robot stories are included. "Cal," the first, would seem nothing special to the reader unfamiliar with Asimov – just a good read. The joy in this tale is the additional pleasure that lies within the subtext only accessible to longtime Asimov readers (a sort of readership loyalty reward). The joke for those in the know is that the plot ending is a deliberate cliché that Asimov reacted against decades ago, and in doing so gave the genre one of his most memorable contributions, and yet he manages to tie it together with a self-referential statement that sums up Asimov the man in six words. Along the way, as a bonus, "Cal" includes a new "George and Azazel" fantasy story (more of them later).

The other robot story, "Kid Brother," isn't one of Asimov's usual cerebral tales, but contains a grim moral lesson that I found all the more shocking as I can't think of any other Asimov story that includes such carnage (necessary as it is to the plot). "Hallucination," apart from "Gold," is the other longer story included in this collection. It's "juvenile sf": a teenager has to solve a mystery on an alien planet. Nothing profound, but an enjoyable 1950s-ish story. To quote the Good Doctor: "enough readers like them to justify their publication."

"Gold" is the story that forms the centrepiece of the book. It won him a Hugo in 1992 (the year he died). "Gold" concerns the production of a computer-generated holographic movie, a compu-drama. It begins with a description of *King Lear* done in this medium, and then a science-fiction writer, named Gregory Laborian, offers the movie-maker 200 pieces of gold to make a compu-drama of his sf novel. The novel is, in fact, the middle part of Asimov's own *The Gods Themselves*, the work that won him a Hugo and a Nebula in 1973. Asimov then proceeds to describe the compu-drama of his own acclaimed novel – perhaps his challenge to the future?

The other stories are only two-to-eight pages long – basically making points or puns. The best is "Left to Right," which not only induces a well-earned groan from the reader at the end, but also captures the personality of the sf writer Robert L. Forward in



## Three more from the good doctor

Nigel Brown

a few deftly written pages. The next quarter of the book is devoted to 18 articles concerning science fiction, including pieces on psychohistory and the robot chronicles, whilst the final quarter is about writing science fiction itself. Many of these articles were originally editorials in *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (ASFM).

**Magic** (HarperCollins, £15.99) is the companion volume to *Gold*. Also half-fiction, half-articles, it collects the later "George and Azazel" stories first seen in *ASFM* that were written after the *Azazel* story-collection (Doubleday, 1988). Asimov originally conceived them as fantasy-mysteries, and sold two to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, but Shawna McCarthy, then the editor of *ASFM*, objected to this and so, at her request, he changed the mini-demon into a mini-alien and the magic into advanced technology, citing Clarke's Law. The *Azazel* stories are therefore "soft sf" but, just to confuse matters, when they were collected into book form Asimov was requested by a different editor to change them back to "magic" stories... this enabled the book to be billed as Asimov's first collection of fantasies! In *Magic*, however, this posthumous collection of later *Azazels* are in the original sf extraterrestrial form as written for *ASFM*, and are therefore not strictly fantasies at all.

All of the *Azazels* follow the same structure: the narrator – plainly Asimov himself – meets his deadbeat friend George. George then relates the story of a bizarre friend or relative of his with a problem and how he tries to help by invoking Azazel's magic/advanced science. Inevitably it goes wrong, with humorous consequences. These stories are influenced by P. G.

Wodehouse, one of Asimov's literary loves. He justified their inclusion in *ASFM* as a lighthearted break from the perhaps otherwise serious tone of the magazine. Read in a collection, their similarity does pall a little, but Asimov's inventiveness and skill at describing quirky situations featuring types of characters not found elsewhere in his fiction reveals a skill that he suppressed for the sake of the form in much of his fiction writing.

The other stories are two fairy tales and a Batman story reprinted from the prose anthology *The Further Adventures of Batman* that thankfully owes more to Philip José Farmer's *Tarzan Alive* spoof biography than to Miller's *Dark Knight*.

The third quarter of the book is mainly a collection of editorials from *ASFM* relating to fantasy, but it's in the final quarter that the strain of this "fantasy" book theme shows. It's titled "Beyond Fantasy" and collects various articles ranging in subject from literacy to racism. All good essays, as only Asimov could write, but nothing to do with fantasy. If there's a failing to this book, as with *Gold*, it's the lack of a complete index of sources. Copyright notices give dates, but I think a large percentage of Asimov's Gentle Readers would have appreciated more information. Asimov himself was a stickler for this finishing touch to his books.

Also, considering both volumes together, I suspect it was a "good idea at the time" – the marketing dept. perhaps? – but Asimov was not really a fantasy writer, so to end his publishing career posthumously with two books that give the impression he contributed equally to both sf and fantasy is wrong. A complete book of final stories and a volume of final essays would have been better – and a truer reflection of his remarkable career.

**Yours, Isaac Asimov: A Lifetime of Letters** (Doubleday, USA, 1995), edited by brother Stanley Asimov, is an additional treat for all Gentle Readers. It's almost an addendum to *I. Asimov: A Memoir* (Doubleday, 1994), which gives Asimov's opinions about personal subjects glossed over or skirted around in his previous autobiographies *In Memory Yet Green* (1979) and *In Joy Still Felt* (1980). The letters, being private correspondence, also give an insight into Asimov even beyond his autobiographical editorials in *ASFM*.

Was Asimov really as he portrayed himself? On a personal note, I met him in Boston in 1980 when, despite being one of the Big Three, he was as approachable and friendly as the personality that comes through in his writing. Asimov never believed in life after death, but surely he achieved it in print.

Nigel Brown

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

**Ash, Sarah. *Moths to a Flame*.** Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-307-6, 260pp, A-format paperback, cover by Felix Mas, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1995; it's based on the story "Mothmusic" first published in Interzone; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Iz* 98.) 15th April 1996.

**Ash, Sarah. *Songspinners*.** Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-421-8, 325pp, hardcover, cover by Max Schindler, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen]; the author's second novel, it's based on the story "Airs from Another Planet" first published in Interzone.) 15th April 1996.

**Attanasio, A. A. *The Dark Shore*.** "The magnificent epic fantasy." Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-64946-1, 500pp, hardcover, cover by Mike Van Houten, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received.) 18th July 1996.

**Baird, Wilhelmina. *Clipjoint*.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00090-8, 325pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bruce Jensen, \$4.99. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *Croscourse*; "Wilhelmina Baird" is a pseudonym of British author Joyce Hutchinson; this was sent to us by Penguin, who are planning a UK Roc edition on 30th May 1996, priced at £4.99.) Late entry: September 1994 publication, received in April 1996.

**Ballard, J. G. *A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews*.** Picador USA, ISBN 0-312-14440-7, 304pp, hardcover, \$23. (Non-fiction collection by a major sf writer, first published in the UK, 1996; it gathers pieces, mainly short, written for magazines and newspapers between 1962 and 1995, and is divided into sections headed "Film," "Lives," "The Visual World," "Writers," "Science," "Autobiography," "Science Fiction" and "In General"; a couple of these pieces have appeared in Interzone in the past; recommended.) May 1996.

**Barker, Clive. *Sacrament*.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-22351-7, 434pp, hardcover.

£15.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received.) 8th July 1996.

**Baxter, John.**  
**Steven Spielberg: The Unauthorised Biography.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-255587-3, xii+457pp, hardcover, £18. (Biography

of the world's most successful sf filmmaker; first edition; this is a fascinating study, which makes a serious effort to get under its enigmatic subject's skin; Baxter, erstwhile sf novelist and author of the pioneering *Science Fiction in the Cinema* [1970], is just the man to do Spielberg's life story; along the way, he compares his subject to Ray Bradbury, quotes extensively from an interview he conducted with J. G. Ballard, and makes many other sf references; did you know that Spielberg's father was an *Analogs* fan?) 3rd June 1996.

**Bear, Greg. *Legacy*.** Legend, ISBN 0-99-935071-8, 410pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; a follow-up to *Eon* and *Eternity*; reviewed by Paul McAuley in Interzone 102.) 20th June 1996.

**Bear, Greg, with Martin Greenberg, eds. *New Legends*.** Legend, ISBN 0-99-931901-2, x+419pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf anthology, first published in 1995; all-new stories by Poul Anderson, Gregory Benford, Greg Egan, Geoffrey A. Landis, Ursula Le Guin, Paul J. McAuley, Mary Rosenblum, Robert Sheekley, Robert Silverberg and others; reviewed by Stephen Baxter in Interzone 97.) 16th May 1996.

**Bibby, James. *Ronan the Barbarian: Translated from the Original Gibberish*.** Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-308-4, 260pp, A-format paperback, cover by Stephen Player, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1995; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 100; Orion would seem to be in the process of killing off their "Millennium" imprint, as this book and other recent titles have "Orion" on the spine and mention "Millennium" only on the title page.) 7th May 1996.

**Blish, James. *A Dusk of Idols and Other Stories*.** Edited by Francis Lyall. Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4967-0, 182pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf collection, first edition; eight stories, mainly from the 1950s, including the novella "Beep"; this is a companion

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volume to a previous Lyall-edited Blish book, *A Work of Art and Other Stories* [1993; reviewed by Graham Andrews in *Interzone* 82]; it's good to see Blish coming back into print, but for long-time readers who already have copies of collections like *Golic Cluster* and *The*

*Best of James Blish* there is little that is unfamiliar here; Lyall has contributed a nine-page introduction, recommended to newer sf readers.) 30th May 1996.

**Bradbury, Stephen. *Reflections: The Art of Stephen Bradbury*.** Text by David J. Howe. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-339-7, 128pp, very large-format paperback, £12.99. (Fantasy art collection, first edition; full-colour reproductions throughout; Bradbury is a British cover artist who specializes in rather delicate, pastel fantasies – slightly reminiscent of, though less distinctive than, the work of American painter Thomas Canty.) 16th May 1996.

**Brooks, Terry. *First King of Shannara*.** "A prelude to *The Sword of Shannara". Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39652-9, 489pp, hardcover, cover by Keith Parkinson, \$23.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) Late entry: 7th March publication, received in April 1996.*

**Brosnan, John. *Have Demon, Will Travel*.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-051231-9, 168pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Sample, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; follow-up to *Darned and Fancy*; this one says "Legend" on the title page but "Arrow" on the spine – are the publishers trying to angle to a wider market?) 18th April 1996.

**Bunch, Chris. *The Wind After Time: Book One of The Shadow Warrior*.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38735-X, 263pp, A-format paperback, cover by Nicholas Jainschigg, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a first solo novel, in space-operatic vein, by this author whose many previous books were written in collaboration with Allan Cole.) Late entry: 1st March publication, received in April 1996.

**Bury, Stephen. *Interface*.** "A Monchurian Candidate for the computer age." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-57240-7, 632pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bruce Jensen, \$5.99. (Near-future sf comedy thriller, first published in the USA, 1994; "Stephen Bury" is a joint pseudonym for sf novelist Neal Stephenson "and another

writer"; this has been sent to us by Penguin/Michael Joseph, who are planning a UK trade paperback edition on 4th July 1996, priced at £11.99.) Late entry: June 1995 publication, received in April 1996.

**Card, Orson Scott. *Children of the Mind*.** "The fourth and final Ender novel!" Tor, ISBN 0-312-85395-5, 349pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; follow-up to *Xenocide*.) August 1996.

**Carter, Raphael. *The Fortune Fall*.** "A stunning debut SF novel of virtual reality." Tor, ISBN 0-312-86034-X, 288pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is a debut book by an American writer about whom we're told nothing except that [s]he "lives in Minneapolis"; most of the people who have given the book gushing pre-publication quotes – Emma Bull, Suzy McKee Charnas, Lisa Goldstein, Maureen F. McHugh, Susan Palwick, Delia Sherman – are women, so this may be a new female writer; it's dedicated to Pamela Dyer-Bennet [better known as "Pamela Dean"], and another fantasy writer, Patricia Wrede, is credited with having given help.) July 1996.

**Carver, Jeffrey A. *The Infinite Sea: The Chaos Chronicles, Volume Three*.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85609-1, 380pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; follow-up to *Neptune Crossing* [reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 84] and *Stronger Attractors*.) August 1996.

**Clayton, Jo. *Drum Warning*.** "Book One of The Drums of Chaos." Tor, ISBN 0-312-81177-X, 370pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; this represents a graduation to hardcover for an author who "has been laboring in the salt mines of paperback original fiction for over 15 years, perfecting her craft with over 40 books," according to the publicity letter from editor Debbie Notkin; over 40 books! – and she didn't even get an entry in the *St James Guide to Fantasy Writers!*) July 1996.

**Clute, John. *Look at the Evidence: Essays and Reviews*.** "Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies No. 10." Liverpool University Press, ISBN 0-85323-830-8, xii+465pp, trade paperback, cover by Judith Clute, £15.95. (Collection of reviews and essays concerning sf, first published in the USA, 1996; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; this slipped out from Serconia Press in the USA early this year, but we haven't seen either edition until

now; compared to Clute's first such book, the slim *Strokes* [1992], this is a massive compilation, containing virtually all the material he wrote between 1987 and 1993; many of the reviews first appeared in *Interzone*, but others come from *Foundation*, *The Listener*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *New Scientist*, the *New York Review of SF*, *New Worlds*, *Omni*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Washington Post* and elsewhere; a very impressive body of tough, knotty [and frequently funny] criticism; recommended.) *April 1996*.

Cole, Allan, and Chris Bunch. **Kingdoms of the Night.** "An Epic Fantasy of the Anteros." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38732-5, 436pp, A-format paperback, cover by Gremo, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995; third in the trilogy which began with *The For Kingdoms* and *The Warrior's Tale*; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 99.) *1st April 1996*.

Dalkey, Kara. **Goat Blood of the Goddess**, I, Tor, ISBN 0-312-86000-5, 252pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's set in the Portuguese colony of Goa, India, in the 16th century; the author is married to sf novelist John Barnes.) *August 1996*.

Datzow, Ellen, and Terri Winding, eds. **The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Ninth Annual Collection**. St Martin's Griffin, ISBN 0-312-14450-4, approx. 624pp, trade paperback, cover by Thomas Canty, \$17.95. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; it contains reprint stories and poems by Margaret Atwood, Peter S. Beagle, Terry Bisson, Scott Bradford, A. S. Byatt, Pat Cadigan, Charles de Lint, Terry Dowling, Neil Gaiman, Stephen King, Ellen Kushner, Ursula Le Guin, Patricia A. McKillip, Joyce Carol Oates, Robert Reed, Michael Marshall Smith, S. P. Somtow, Nancy Willard, Jane Yolen and many others; as ever, a very impressive line-up.) *July 1996*.

Feist, Raymond E. **Rise of a Merchant Prince: Volume II of the Serpentwar Saga**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-649700-4, 406pp, C-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995.) *7th May 1996*.

Foster, Alan Dean. **Green-thieves**. Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4897-6, vii+245pp, hardcover, £16.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1994; it has appeared previously in the

UK as an Orbit paperback.) *25th April 1996*.

Foster, Alan Dean. **Mad Amos**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39362-7, 275pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99.

(Fantasy/western collection, first edition; a change of pace, but a logical one, for this Arizona-resident author – ten tall tales of the old west, several of them reprinted from *Fantasy & Science Fiction*; two are original to the book.) *Lotus* entry: *1st March publication, received in April 1996*.

Garland, Linda and Roger. **The Book of the Unicorn**. Text by Nigel Suckling. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-360-5, 128pp, very large-format paperback, £12.95. (Fantasy art book, first edition; full-colour paintings throughout; there is a substantial text by Suckling consisting of retold tales and "the history of the unicorn" as a legendary motif.) *16th May 1996*.

Green, Sharon. **Game's End**. AvonNova, ISBN 0-380-77725-8, 262pp, A-format paperback, cover by Daniel Horne, \$5.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the first Sharon Green novel we've been sent for review in a long while, although she has been publishing steadily in the USA for many years; her last was called *Wind Whispers, Shadow Shouts* [1995].) *April 1996*.

Greenland, Colin. **Seasons of Plenty: The Tabitha Jute Trilogy, Volume 2**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-647344-X, 485pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in 1995; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 100.) *22nd April 1996*.

Haining, Peter, ed. **Ghost Movies II: Famous Supernatural Television Programmes**. Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4966-2, viii+242pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains ten reprinted stories, by Algernon Blackwood, Leon Garfield, Susan Hill, Elizabeth Jane Howard, M. R. James, Dean Koontz, William F. Nolan and others; the book's title is misleading: these are, for the most part, stories upon which TV series segments were based – so "movies" [a word which generally means Hollywood feature films] have nothing to do with it; but this anthology is a follow-up to an earlier one, that we didn't see, which did contain stories that had inspired cinema films.) *30th May 1996*.

Haining, Peter, ed. **Space Movies II: Famous Science Fiction Television Series**. Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4897-6, viii+245pp, hardcover, £15.99. (SF anthology, first edition; it contains ten reprinted stories, by Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Evan

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Haining, Peter, ed. **Space Movies II: Famous Science Fiction Television Series**. Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4897-6, viii+245pp, hardcover, £15.99. (SF anthology, first edition; it contains ten reprinted stories, by Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Evan

Hunter, Nigel Kneale, Terry Pratchett, Rod Serling, John Wyndham and others; concerning the book's title, the same comments apply as in the previous entry.) *25th April 1996*.

Hall, Hal W. **Science Fiction and Fantasy Book Review Index: Volume 21, 1990**. SFBJR [3608 Meadow Oaks Lane, Bryan, TX 77802, USA], ISBN 0-935064-25-7, 105pp, paperback, \$12.50. (Index to book reviews in the sf/fantasy field, first edition; a valuable reference work, listing reviews which appeared in a wide range of publications, from *Aboriginal SF* through *Interzone* to *Weird Tales*; the only problem with this ongoing indexing project is that the annual parts tend to appear so late in the day – though the compiler tells us in an accompanying letter that he is making efforts to catch up.) *Lotus* entry: it states "1994" inside, but received by us in April 1996.

Hamilton, Peter F. **Midstar Rising**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85955-4, 383pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (SF novel, first published in the UK, 1993; proof copy received.) *Autumn 1996*.

Harrison, Harry, and John Holm. **King and Emperor**. "The Hammer and the Cross, Book Three." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85692-X, 378pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Alternative-world SF novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; "John Holm" is a pseudonym of Tom Shippey.) *July 1996*.

Holligon, Sheila. **Bridestones**. Signet/Creed, ISBN 0-451-18331-2, 246pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?]; a second book by the author of *Nighttrider*; for some reason, it states "first published 1995" inside; is it possible there was an earlier hardcover edition Penguin have kept secret from us all, or has the book just been delayed for several months?) *25th April 1996*.

Holt, Tom. **Djinn Rummy**. "A work of comic genies." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-363-8, 277pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Lee, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1995; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 103.) *5th May 1996*.

Jakubowski, Maxim. **Life in the World of Women: A Collection of Vile, Dangerous and Loving Stories**. The Do-Not Press [PO Box 4215, London SE23 2QD], ISBN 1-899344-06-3, 181 pp, small-press paperback, £6.99. (Erotic short-story collection, first edition; we're not sure this is of any sf/fantasy relevance, other than the fact that Maxim Jakubowski used to be an sf writer, translator, editor and agent, and is now owner of "New Worlds" sf bookshop [part of "Murder One," Charing Cross Road, London]; The Do-Not Press is an interesting new publishing venture which has also released Jakubowski's crime anthology [co-edited with Mike Ripley], *Fresh Blood*.) *19th April 1996*.

Jones, Stephen. **The Illustrated Werewolf Movie Guide**. Introduction by Curt Siodmak. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-658-6, 143pp, very large-format paperback, £12.99. (Illustrated guide to horror films, first edition; the definition of "werewolf" is stretched rather to include adaptations of *The Beauty and the Beast*, *The Island of Dr Moreau*, "cat people" movies and the like; this is a delayed fourth volume in the series which included earlier volumes on vampire movies, Frankenstein movies and dinosaur movies.) *9th May 1996*.

Kay, Guy Gavriel. **The Lions of Al-Rassan**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648030-6, xii+590pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mel Odom, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in Canada [?], 1995; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 101.) *20th May 1996*.

Kennealy-Morrison, Patricia. **The Hedge of Mist**. "A Book of The Keltiad." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648230-9, xiii+502pp, A-format paperback, cover by Thomas Canty, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; it's a follow-up to *The Oak Above the Kings* [published by in the UK by HarperCollins two years ago, but not sent to us for review] in the "Tales of Arthur" sub-series of *Keltiad* novels; the author seems to have everything planned out for the rest of her working life: in the back of this volume she lists no less than 12 "forthcoming" novels in the series [she has been averaging just one book every two years since her debut in 1984; so, assuming the same rate of production, that little lot should take her 24 years].) *20th May 1996*.

Kerr, Katharine. **Daggerspell: New Revised Edition**. "Volume I of the epic Deverry series." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648224-4, xv+461pp, A-format

paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986; previous Grafton/HarperCollins editions seem to have gone through a dozen printings; this revised version dates from 1993.) *17th April 1996.*

Laws, Stephen. **Daemonic**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-66673-0, 488pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Blake, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1995; "this is Laws's loving tribute to schlock horror movies," says the accompanying publicity sheet, "a classic tale of an apparently disparate group of people lured to the fortress-mansion of a reclusive ex-film director only to find themselves trapped in a bizarre labyrinth...") *16th May 1996.*

Lee, Tanith. **Darkness**, I. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-13956-X, 408pp, hardcover, £24.95. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1994; third in the "Blood Opera" sequence; reviewed by Irfan Shah in *Interzone* 92.) Late entry: *18th January* publication, received in *April 1996.*

McCarthy, Wil. **Murder in the Solid State**. "A nanotechnology thriller — from a hot new hard-science author." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85938-4, 252pp, hardcover, £21.95. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is a third book by an American writer known for his short stories [one of which appeared in *Interzone* 47, the Aboriginal SF crossover issue]; his first two novels were US paperback originals, and we never saw them.) *July 1996.*

May, Julian. **Magnificat: Book Three of the Galactic Millieu Trilogy**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-222968-4, 447pp, hardcover, cover by Stephen Bradbury, £15.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 108.) *23rd May 1996.*

Monahan, Brent. **The Blood of the Covenant**. "A Novel of the Vampiric." New English Library, ISBN 0-340-63824-2, 311pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1995; this mass-market paperback appears only three months after the UK hardcover; we're told that Monahan "lives in Pennsylvania and is author of three previous novels, including *The Uprising*, *The Book of Common Dred* and *Deathbrite* [co-authored with Michael Maryk].") *16th May 1996.*

Moorcock, Michael. **Sailing to Utopia**. "The Tale of the Eternal Champion, Vol. S." Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-306-8, S47pp, A-format paperback, cover by Yoshitaka Amano, £6.99. (SF omnibus, first published in 1993; it contains: *The Ice Schooner* [1969], *The Black Corridor* [1969; with Hilary Bailey], *The Distort Suns* [1975; with James Cawthorn] and the short story "Flux" [1962; with Barry Bayley] plus a short preface by the author.) *1st April 1996.*

Newman, Kim. **The Bloody Red Baron**. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-684-81744-6, 358pp, hardcover, cover by Fred Gamblin, £14.99. (Horror/sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; sequel to *Anno Dracula*, set 30 years later during an alternative First World War; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 105.) *23rd May 1996.*

Niven, Larry. **The Ringworld Throne**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-399-9, 424pp, hardcover, cover by John Harris, £16.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1996; proof copy received; a belated sequel to *Ringworld* [1970] and *Ringworld Engineers* [1979].) *4th July 1996.*

Pederson, Jay P., ed. **St James Guide to Science Fiction Writers**. Preface by H. Bruce Franklin. Bibliographic editor Robert Reginald. St James Press [835 Penobscot Building, Detroit, MI 48226-4094, USA]. ISBN 1-55862-179-2, xxiv+175pp, hardcover, \$155. (Alphabetically arranged bibliographical and critical guide to over 600 sf [and fantasy] authors; first edition; it's described as the "Fourth Edition," but previous editions [which had different editors] appeared under a quite different title, *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers* [1981, 1986 and 1991]; while it's pleasing to have this big new version [with improved bibliographies, thanks to Robert Reginald's expert input], it's rather galling to find that it still contains so many entries for non-sf fantasy writers — Dunsany, Eddings, Edison, Ru Emerson, Feist, Craig Shaw Gardner, Gemmill, Haggard, Hughart, Kurtz, George MacDonald, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Tolkien, Peake, Susan Schwartz, Thorne Smith, Nancy Springer, Judith Tarr, etc; now that a companion volume, *St James Guide to Fantasy Writers*, exists [published more or less simultaneously with this volume and containing entries on all the aforementioned] these non-sf

entries are surely egregious: they bump up the size and the cost of this book unnecessarily and will perhaps detract from the sales of the fantasy volume.) Late entry: *January (?)* publication, received in April 1996.

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entries are surely egregious: they bump up the size and the cost of this book unnecessarily and will perhaps detract from the sales of the fantasy volume.) Late entry: *January (?)* publication, received in April 1996.

Pollack, Rachel.  
**Godmother**

**Night at the Novel**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-14606-X, 355pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *September 1996.*

Reimann, Katya. **Wind from a Foreign Sky**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86007-2, 379pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's a debut novel by a new American writer.) *July 1996.*

Rosenberg, Joel. **The Fire Duke: Keepers of the Hidden Ways, Book One**. Avon-Nova, ISBN 0-380-27207-0, 354pp, A-format paperback, cover by Matt Stawicki, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995; the author is previously best known for his *Guardians of the Flame* series.) *April 1996.*

Rosenblum, Mary. **Synthesis & Other Virtual Entities**. Illustrated by Elizabeth Lawhead Bourne. Arkham House, ISBN 0-87054-170-6, xvi+280pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$21.95. (SF collection, first edition; it contains eight stories, all from the same magazine, *Asimov's*; Rosenblum, a rising star, is now the author of three sf novels.) *15th July 1996.*

Scott, Melissa. **Night Sky Mine**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85875-2, 384pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *August 1996.*

Sheekley, Robert. **Draconian New York**. Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-312-85130-8, 224pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Crime novel by a well-known sf writer, first edition; proof copy received; a follow-up to Sheekley's earlier "comeback" mystery novel, *The Alternative Detective* [1993], about an ex-hippy sleuth called Hob Draconian.) *July 1996.*

Stableford, Brian. **The Carnival of Destruction**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0334-4, 433pp, A-format paperback, \$6.95. (SF/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1994; sequel to *The Werewolves of London* and *The Angel of Pain*.) *May 1996.*

Stableford, Brian. **Salamander's Fire: The Second Book of**

**Genesys**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-944351-1, 518pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Salwowski, £16.99. (SF novel, first edition.) *16th May 1996.*

Stableford, Brian. **Serpent's Blood: The First Book of Genesys**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-944341-4, 48pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £5.99. (SF novel, first published in 1995; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 100.) *16th May 1996.*

Sussex, Lucy, and Judith Raphael Buckrich, eds. **She's Fantastical**. "The first anthology of Australian women's speculative fiction, magical realism and fantasy." Foreword by Ursula K. Le Guin. Sybilla Feminist Press [1st Floor, Ross House, 247-251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000, Australia]. ISBN 0-908-20512-7, 260pp, small-press paperback, cover by Deborah Klein, \$A22.95. (SF/fantasy anthology, first edition; a nicely produced book, it contains a mix of new and reprint stories by Isobelle Carmody, M. Barnard Eldershaw, Leanne Fahram, Gabrielle Lord, Rosaleen Love, Philippa Maddern, Yvonne Rousseau, Lucy Sussex and many others; it may be ordered from Slow Glass Books, GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia — a bookshop that we recommend for all Australian sf/fantasy titles.) Late entry: *September 1995* publication, received in *April 1996.*

Tarr, Judith. **King and Goddess**. Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-312-86092-7, 384pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Historical novel by a well-known fantasy writer; first edition; proof copy received; about Queen Hatshepsut of ancient Egypt, this has no fantasy content that we can discern; in an afterword the author informs us that almost all the characters are actual historical persons.) *May 1996.*

Tepper, Sheri S. **Gibbon's Decline and Fall**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-10054-8, 404pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (SF/fantasy novel; first edition; proof copy received; the publishers describe this one as "science fantasy" [an always problematical classification]; despite its odd title, it appears to have nothing to do with the Roman Empire and is set in the year 2000.) *August 1996.*

Thorne, Nicola. **Repossession**. Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4931-X, 214pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror novel, first edition; "Nicola Thorne" is a pseudonym of Rosemary Ellerbeck, a prolific South African-born British author, mainly of romantic historicals and gothics;

among many other things, she was responsible for the Emily Bronte sequel, *Return to Wuthering Heights* [1977], as by "Anna L'Estrange." 25th April 1996.

Turner, George. *Vanegory*. AvonNova, ISBN 0-380-77885-8, 339pp, A-format paperback, cover by Eric Peterson, \$5.99. (SF novel, first published in the UK, 1981; although it's an old title, this is the first George Turner novel we've been sent for review in many years; an Australian, he continues to have new novels published in America [Brain Child, *The Destiny Makers* and *Genetic Soldier* are three fairly recent ones – has anyone in Britain seen them?], but the last UK-published item we received was his Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning *The Sea and Summer* [Faber, hc, 1987; Grafton, pb, 1989] – all too typical of British publishing, that: he wins the Clarke Award, evidently a severe embarrassment for Messrs Faber, and they stop publishing him.) April 1996.

Vira, Soma. *Double Lives: Angel Trails, Book I*. "New Age comes to science fiction as humans battle the natural and the supernatural." Space Link Books [77 West 55th St., New York, NY 10019, USA], ISBN 0-96460570-8, 192pp, trade paperback, £11.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1996; the author was born in Lucknow, India, but lives in America; we

Bassingthwaite, Don. *Such Pain. "The World of Darkness: Mage"*. Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0310-X, 325pp, A-format paperback, cover by Janet Aulesio Danheiser, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy card-game spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; it's copyright "White Wolf, Inc.); this is a debut novel by a Canadian writer.) 25th April 1996.

Bassom, David. *The A-Z of Babylon 5*. "The complete reference guide to the ground-breaking sci-fi drama." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0252-9, 372pp, B-format paperback, £8.99. (Who's who and what's what of the SF television series created by J. Michael Straczynski; first edition; it contains eight pages of colour photographs; we don't know how other people feel, but we're beginning to get just a teensy bit tired of hearing about Straczynski's "unique 5-year story arc"; is this really the first US TV series which has had a continuing narrative, and is it really such a big deal?) 25th April 1996.

Bishop, David, and James Stevens. *Who Killed Kennedy? The Shocking Secret Linking*

seem to have been bombarded with her novels lately, all of which, suspiciously, carry a "1996" copyright date [possibly they appeared in India earlier]; the book is distributed in the UK by Gazelle Book Services Ltd, Falcon House, Queen Square, Lancaster, LA1 1RN.) No date shown: received in April 1996.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *The Sirens of Titan*. Indigo, ISBN 0-575-40023-7, 224pp, B-format paperback, cover by Gary Day-Ellison, £5.99. (Humorous SF novel, first published in the USA, 1959, the classic SF piss-take in its umpteenth UK paperback edition; "Indigo" is a new imprint of Cassell/Gollancz.) 25th April 1996.

Wells, Angus. *Exile's Children*. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-304-1, 582pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Posen, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995.) 7th May 1996.

White, John. *Biograph*. Fractal Press [1 Low Mill Cottage, Old Mill Lane, Grassington, N. Yorks. BD23 5BX], ISBN 1-870735-15-3, 192pp, small-press paperback, £7.99. (SF novel, first edition; rather surprisingly, for what ap-

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pears to be a typical self-published or vanity-press product, it comes with a back-cover commendation from eminent critic Tom Shippey ["Biograph tells how real life could be changed by the interactive revolution, and improved, not just speeded-up... Read it and long for the real liberation, just round the corner"]; presumably a debut novel by a British writer, it may be worth a look.) No date shown: received in April 1996.

Wilson, Robin Scott, ed. *Those Who Can: A Science Fiction Reader*. St Martin's Griffin, ISBN 0-312-14139-4, xii+322pp, trade paperback, \$13.95. (SF anthology, first published in the USA, 1973; an extensively annotated "how-to" anthology, it contains reprint stories by Samuel R. Delany, Harlan Ellison, James E. Gunn, Daniel Keyes, Damon Knight, Ursula Le Guin, Frederik Pohl, Joanna Russ, Robert Silverberg, Kate Wilhelm and the editor; recommended for aspiring writers.) April 1996.

Young, William H. *A Study of Action-Adventure Fiction: The Executioner and Mack Bolan*. "Studies in American Literature, Vol. 18." Edwin Mellen Press [Box 450, Lewiston, NY

14092-0450, USA], ISBN 0-7734-8918-5, ii+542pp, hardcover, \$119.95. (History and critical study of the "Executioner/Mack Bolan" series of thrillers by Don Pendleton and others; first edition; this weighty tome is not of direct relevance to sf and fantasy, but deals with a sub-species of crime fiction that's not too remote from many paperback-original sf series, particularly the "survivalist"-type post-holocaust series of recent decades; apart from Pendleton himself, among the writers who have contributed to the 200+ volume "Executioner" series since the 1970s are Roland Green, Peter Leslie, Mike McQuay and Mike Newton; an exhaustive, and valuable, case study; for those who are interested, the publishers have a UK contact address: Mellen Press Ltd., Lampeter, Dyfed, PA4 7DY). No date shown: received in April 1996.

Zindell, David. *The Wild*. ["Book Two of A Requiem for Homo Sapiens"] Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-28696-7, 552pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Disimone, \$5.99. (SF novel, first published in the UK, 1995; proof copy received; it states "copyright 1996" inside – which is wrong, as the UK hardcover appeared in November 1995; does Zindell, regarded by many as a major writer, not rate hardcover publication in his home country?) July 1996.

Byers, Richard Lee. *Netherworld*. "The World of Darkness: Vampire." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0320-7, 330pp, A-format paperback, cover by Larry MacDougall, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy card-game spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; it's copyright "White Wolf, Inc."); the author is American, was born in 1950, and has written a number of other spinoff novels and children's books.) 25th April 1996.

Chupp, Sam. *Sins of the Fathers*. "The World of Darkness: Wraith." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0315-0, 257pp, A-format paperback, cover by Joshua Gabriel Timbrook, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy card-game spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; it's copyright "White Wolf, Inc."); we're told nothing about the author of this one.) 25th April 1996.

Corry, Neil. *Shotgun Wedding*. "Bugs: Case File 3." Virgin, ISBN 0-7535-0030-2, 264pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (SF television-series novelization, first edition; it's based on two episodes from the BBC hi-tech thriller series *Bugs*, produced by Brian Eastman: "Shotgun Wed-

## Spinoffery

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.

a Time Lord and a President. "Doctor Who." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20467-0, 279pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (SF television-series spinoff novel, first edition; there is no question-mark in the title, nor should there be; co-author "James Stevens" appears to be a fictional character; Bishop states in his afterword that "this is a work of fiction ... written in the style of a non-fiction conspiracy investigation book"; he also pays a nice tribute to an earlier author of Doctor Who novelizations: "Terrance Dicks, who almost single-handedly got a generation of television children to read books; the authors of the New and Missing Adventures of today are, almost without exception, the readers of Target Books in years gone by.") 18th April 1996.

Briggs, Stephen. *Terry Pratchett's Mort: The Play*. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14429-0, xii+168pp, B-format paperback, cover by Stephen Player, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy play, adapted from Pratchett's novel; first edition.) 9th May 1996.

Briggs, Stephen. *Terry Pratchett's Wyrd Sisters: The Play*. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14430-4, xvi+155pp, B-format paperback, cover by Stephen Player, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy play, adapted from Pratchett's novel; first edition.) 9th May 1996.

Bulls, Christopher. *The Eye of the Giant*. "Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20469-7, 315pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Campbell, £4.99. (SF television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) 18th April 1996.

ding" by Amanda Coe and "Stealth" by Stephen Gallagher [both televised in 1995].) 16th May 1996.

Cox, Greg. **The Armor Trap.** "Iron Man." Illustrated by Gabriel Gecko. Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0306-1, 339pp. A-format paperback, cover by Gecko, £4.99. (Sf comic-book series novelization, first published in the USA, 1995; it's based on the Marvel Comics character created by Stan Lee, Larry Lieber and Don Heck; this is a "Byron Preiss Multimedia Company, Inc" publication – presumably that's a new name for the packaging outfit that used to be known as Byron Preiss Visual Publications.) 1st May 1996.

Derleth, August. **The Mask of Cthulhu.** "Horrific Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos." Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0337-7, 201pp. A-format paperback, \$4.95. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1996; it consists of six pastiche H. P. Lovecraft stories.) 4th April 1996.

Duane, Diane. **The Lizard Sanction.** "Spider-Man." Illustrated by Darick Robertson & Scott Koblish. Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0301-0, 333pp. A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf comic-book series novelization, first published in the USA, 1995; it's based on the Marvel Comics character created by Stan Lee et al, and is the second in a series of novelizations by Duane [we never saw the first, *The Venom Factor*; this is a "Byron Preiss Multimedia Company, Inc" publication].) 1st May 1996.

Foster, Alan Dean. **The Dig.** "From the epic LucasArts CD-Rom." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14490-8, 334pp. A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf computer-game novelization, first published in the USA, 1995; based on a story by Sean Clark; according to an advert for the CD-ROM on the inside back cover, the game was "inspired by" Steven Spielberg and contains dialogue by Orson Scott Card.) 9th May 1996.

Garland, Mark A., and Charles G. McGraw. **Ghost of a Chance.** "Star Trek: Voyager, #7." Pock- et, ISBN 0-671-56798-5, 276pp. A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) 1st April 1996.

Grant, Rob. **Backwards.** "Red Dwarf." Viking, ISBN 0-670-84574-4, 342pp, hardcover, £16. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; a spinoff from the TV sitcom created by the author and his "erstwhile partner" [as he calls him])

Doug Naylor; the first two *Red Dwarf* novels were by "Rob Naylor," the third [which we never saw] was by Naylor alone, and now this fourth is by Grant alone – confusing, isn't it?) 2nd May 1996.

Gravel, Geary. **Might and Magic, Book Two: The Shadow-smith.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38293-5, 280pp. A-format paperback, cover by Donald Clavette, \$5.99. (Fantasy spinoff novel, apparently based on a computer game; first edition; it's copyright "Bill Fawcett & Associates.") 1st April 1996.

Hamby, Barbara. **Children of the Jedi.** "Star Wars." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40879-8, 395pp. A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; reviewed by Brain Stableford in *Interzone* 95.) 9th May 1996.

Hand, Elizabeth. **12 Monkeys.** HarperPrism, ISBN 0-06-105682-8, 213pp. A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf movie novelization, first edition; based on the screenplay by David and Janet Peoples for the film directed by Terry Gilliam; it contains eight pages of stills from the movie; this was sent to us by Boxtree, who were due to release a UK edition on 19th April 1996, priced at £4.99.) Late entry: December 1995 publication, received in April 1996.

Henderson, Jason. **The Element of Fire.** "Highlander." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0294-4, 212pp. A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; the author is described as "an established writer of adventure fantasy fiction" who lives in the USA – but it's the first time we've seen his name.) 18th April 1996.

Krauss, Lawrence M. **The Physics of Star Trek.** Foreword by Stephen Hawking. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-225485-9, xvi+188pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Popular science text, utilizing examples from the *Star Trek* sf TV series; first published in the USA, 1995.) 13th May 1996.

Leonard, Paul. **Out of the Hive.** "Bugs: Case File 1." Virgin, ISBN 0-7535-0015-9, 260pp. A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf television-series novelization, first edition; it's based on two episodes from the BBC series *Bugs: Out of the Hive*" by Dun-

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can Gould and "Assassins Inc." by Stephen Gallagher, both televised in 1995; "Paul Leonard" is a pseudonym of P. J. L. Hinder, who has previously written "Dr Who" novels.) 25th April 1996.

Lewis, S. N. **Cyber-song.** "Star Trek: Voyager, #8." Pock- et, ISBN 0-671-56783-7, 277pp. A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) 3rd June 1996.

McConnell, Ashley. **Scimitar.** "Highlander." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0299-5, 216pp. A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; inspired by the Gaumont Television series, which in turn was inspired by the *Highlander* movies originally conceived by scriptwriter Gregory Widen; the author, who is American, was previously known for a number of *Quantum Leap* spinoffs.) 18th April 1996.

McKinney, Jack. **Before the Invid Storm.** "Robotech, #21." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38776-7, 228pp. A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; it's copyright "Harmony Gold U.S.A., Inc., and Tatsunoko Production Co., Ltd.); "Jack McKinney" is a shared pseudonym of Brian C. Daley and James Luceno; the former has died recently.) 1st April 1996.

Mitchell, Sandy. **All Under Control.** "Bugs: Case File 2." Virgin, ISBN 0-7535-0020-5, 250pp. A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf television-series novelization, first edition; it's based on two episodes, "All Under Control" by Duncan Gould and "Down Among the Dead Men" by Stephen Gallagher, shown in 1995; "Sandy Mitchell" is a pseudonym of Alex Stewart, who has written short stories for *Interzone* and elsewhere; this may be his first published novel.) 25th April 1996.

Peel, John. **Objective: Bajor.** "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, #15." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-56811-6, 278pp. A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) 3rd June 1996.

Perry, Steve. **Shadows of the Empire.** "Star Wars." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04040-6, 340pp, hardcover, cover by

Drew Struzan, £12.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) 9th May 1996.

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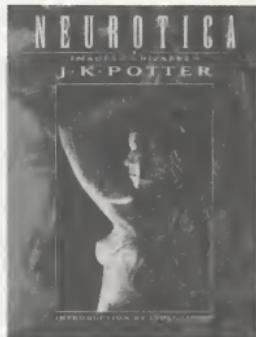
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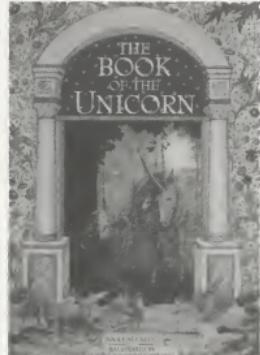
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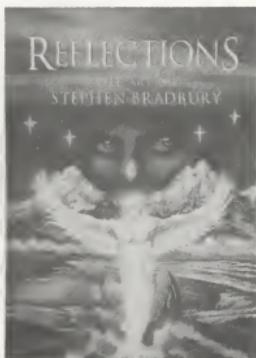
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